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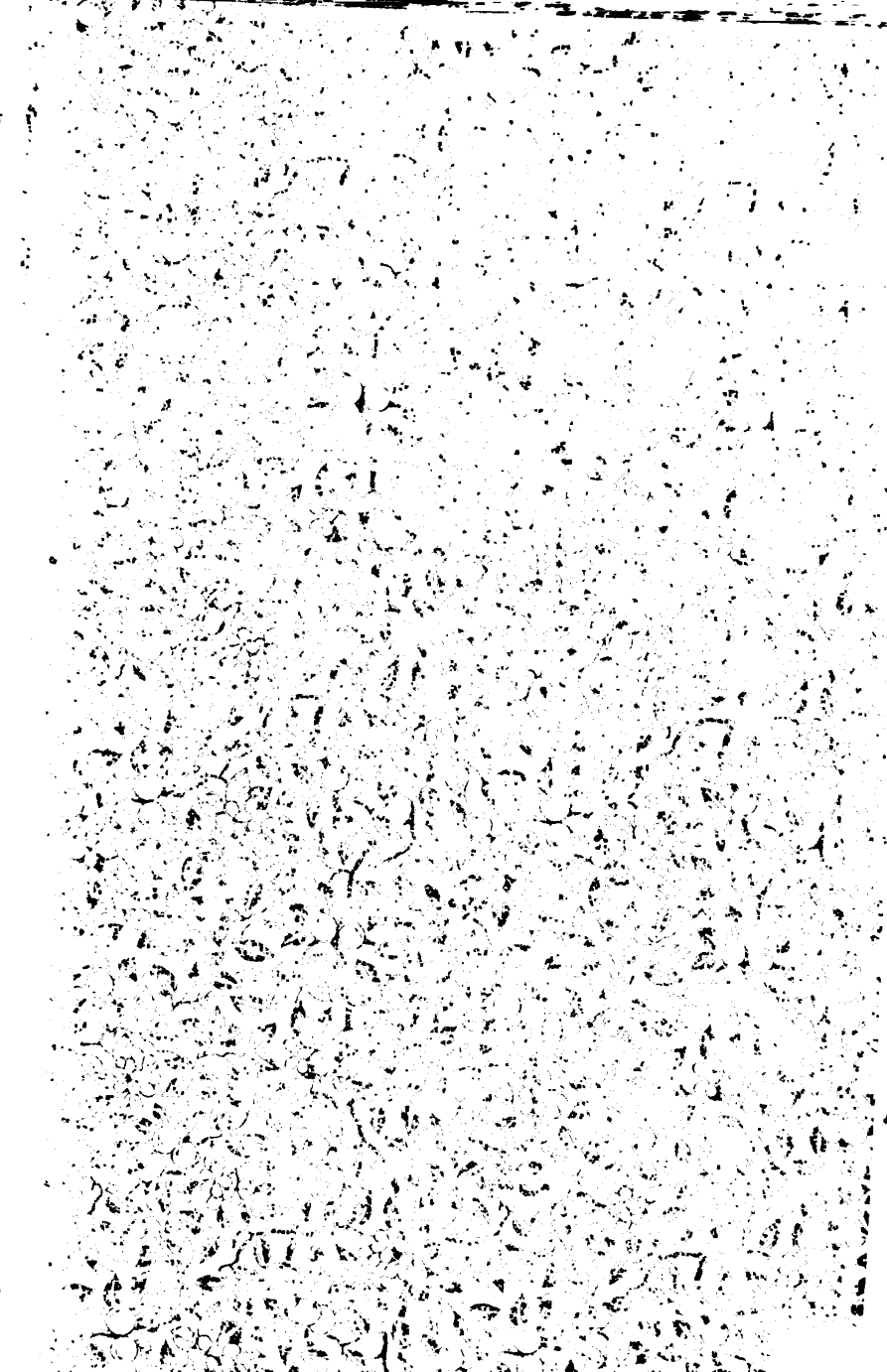
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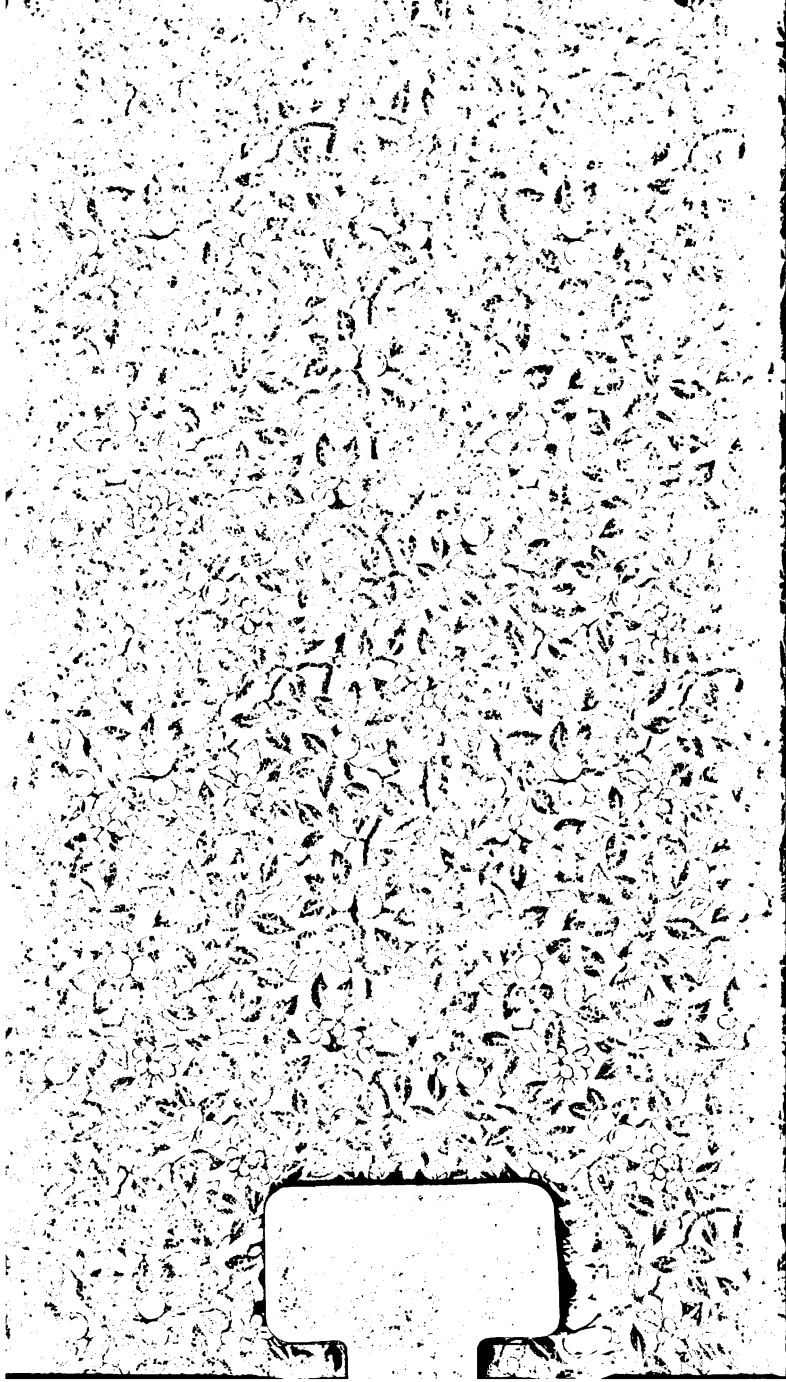
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VENETIA'S LOVERS

An Uneventful Story

BY LESLIE KEITH

AUTHOR OF "SURRENDER," "ALASNAM'S LADY," ETC.



IN THREE VOLUMES—VOL. II.

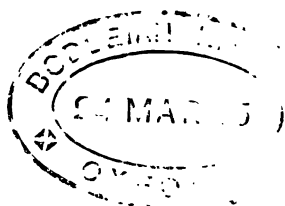
LONDON

RICHARD BENTLEY & SON, NEW BURLINGTON ST.

Publishers in Ordinary to Her Majesty the Queen

1884

256. e. 1286.



Printed by R. & R. CLARK, Edinburgh.

VENETIA'S LOVERS.

I.

IN spite of that permission to quarrel and make it up again, Challice did not see Venetia for the next few days. The fatigue and the shock to his system from the neglected burns had induced a slight attack of fever, which hung about him like a sinister oppression and shaped his waking and sleeping moments alike into ugly haunting dreams.

Through them all there was woven that background of greedy mocking flame creeping stealthily across the moorland sea, and sending the frightened things that made

their home there scudding to the shelter of the woods ; but instead of the larches and pines, with their tossing arms and wailful voices that seemed to sigh "come and save us," it was Venetia who stood alone, calm and still, waiting that on-coming crimson line with a brave light in her eyes ; but though he fought and strove, and was mad to save her, always when he seemed to have reached out his hand across that barrier of flame to clasp hers and lead her away, it was another woman who stood between them—a woman with a smile on her cold, clear-cut lips—and then, and then——

"But Venetia was out on the hilltop in the sunlight with Dick," he said half aloud ; he opened his eyes, and they rested upon Mrs. Arabin's kind face, framed in her neat cap border, looking down into his own.

"Well, that's true too, though I daresay

you dreamt it," she said. "The child was moping in the house and Dick made her put on her habit and ride with him up to the moor to look at it by daylight."

"I suppose I dreamt it," he said, "though it was the only sensible imagination that visited me. I couldn't have credited one night with holding so many hideous visions. I must have slept shamelessly late to judge by the light, but if you'll extend your grace for once, and keep some breakfast hot for ten minutes, I'll manage to be down by that time."

"I'll dress the burns first, and then you'll see how finely you can manage by yourself," she answered, with her quiet smile.

Challice yielded, and held out his bandaged hands; she did her work skilfully and rapidly, and with that healing in her touch that is the gift of some women; yet Challice was fain to confess himself more of a cripple

than he had allowed, and even admitted that his hands hurt him—a little.

“It would be a queer thing if they didn’t,” retorted his nurse; “and you’ll just content yourself till Dick comes back to help you, for as for that old blethering creature, David——”

“Oh, I remember,” said Challice, with a humorous curl of the lips, “the hero was suffering from a fever brought on by—well, by his over exertions, perhaps! I wonder how Miss Dundas finds the moor to-day, with its black face turned up to this still sky? The wind that I heard in the night seems to have taken itself off to work fresh mischief elsewhere.”

“I’m sure Lord Heatherleigh ought to be very much obliged to you all, for that wood is just the pride of his heart; it was planted when he was a boy, and he knows every tree in it, I believe. I shouldn’t

wonder if the news of the burning would bring him home, and then he'll come up and see you. He's very polite, and he'll make you a fine speech for hurting your hands in his service."

"I devoutly hope not," said Challice hastily. Mrs. Arabin, having finished her professional cares, had brought him a little tray with a basin of soup, and he had succeeded, after a laughing contention with her, in securing the spoon, and was trying to hold it with his bandaged hand, but now he let it fall clumsily.

"A wilful bairn must have its way," she said, and she came to him and took authoritative possession of the basin, feeding him in her gentle, masterful fashion as if he had been a child. There was something very new and odd to Challice in this womanly tending, but it was pleasant too, and he succumbed to the pleasantness with

lazy content, for Miss Dundas was away on the moorland and he could not make his peace with her yet.

"I was getting on famously till you threatened me with Lord Heatherleigh's civilities," he said, with a smile.

"And why shouldn't he come and thank you?"

"Because if he came here I should have to go away."

"Is it so hard as all that—just to be thanked?" she asked.

"Didn't you tell me," he said, busy with his own reflections, "that the property passes to a distant branch at his death—a twig of the family tree long settled in England; and that because—well, perhaps because of his robust feeling of nationality, perhaps because of a quite natural dislike to the idea of those familiar acres passing from his own line, he has come to look on

his heir as an insolent intruder, and to hate the very mention of his name?"

"I don't think I told you anything of the kind, but it's maybe true all the same." Mrs. Arabin removed the tray and smoothed the coverlet with a mechanical touch. "I don't know about the hate—he's a pompous, affected body, but he's not ill-meaning, and why should he hate the poor lad that can't help being his heir?"

"Why, oh, why," said Challice, in mock tragic accents. "And if you happened to know this same 'lad,' Mrs. Arabin, to be a mild and harmless sort of creature—the meekest and most obedient of patients, for instance, to the kindest and most tyrannical of nurses—you would wonder still more, wouldn't you, that anybody could hate him?"

"Bless me! what's he talking about?"

said the old lady in her amaze addressing herself.

"I think he's talking about himself," said Challice meekly.

"Do you mean that you are the heir?"

"It is my misfortune to be so."

"Misfortune?"

"Well, yes," said Challice lightly; "I think it's rather a misfortune. I have enough for all my wants—which are not overwhelming—you see, and what can any man desire more? And, besides, it's a pity to incur anybody's hatred—it's an embarrassing sort of thing even if it is a little ludicrous, to be hated for what you never claimed and don't want, isn't it?"

"I don't see how you can help it."

"Well, I don't either; it's for his lordship to help it, it seems to me."

"Wait till love comes your way, and you get a young wife and have boys and

girls of your own growing up, and you won't talk about embarrassments; they'll teach you how to spend it, never fear."

"These things are not for me."

There was a bitter incisiveness in the curt words that could not fail to strike a listener. It is a fashion with some young men to repudiate and scout at all suggestions of love and married delights, but it is done for the most part in a laughing way and with a lingering on the subject that proves a secret enjoyment of it, but with this young man it was not so; he spoke with a cold decision that left no doubt as to his meaning; he was not subtly bent on alluring his companion to dwell on the topic only that he might protest the more. He had said his say and there was an end of it.

Mrs. Arabin was old and she was wise; any surprise she may have felt she knitted into the long stocking that her fingers were

ceaselessly busy with. "There's some woman, some young lassie, like enough, that has deceived him, and the world looks black to him because his light love has forsaken him," she thought as she deftly turned about the long gray strip in her fingers. And what could well be worse than to have had faith and hope, and to find it all a dream? She could not have been a woman if she had not softened to him in her thoughts because of this little glimpse into the secret chamber of his life.

"Then you haven't seen your kinsman?" she asked, by way of a pleasant descent from a painful subject; "there's a fine slur on our boasted Scotch hospitality!"

"I saw him once," said Challice slowly, "on the unhappiest day of my life—— So you see," he went on more lightly, "I've disagreeable associations with him too, and if I hadn't known him to be

safe in Venice, I daresay I shouldn't have ventured so near his headquarters."

"Well, it's a gain to us that he's away," she answered kindly, "and now I'll pull down the blind, and if you'll promise me to go to sleep, I'll send Dick to you the minute he comes in, and you'll come beside us in the drawing-room and Venice will play to you."

So the room was darkened and he was left alone with that prospect of music and good cheer to come. The house seemed strangely quiet when his kind nurse had left him; he lay recalling the soft intonation of her Scotch voice, and the placid, shrewd lines of her face. What was it about her that made him reveal so much of himself? He was not a man given to confessions and outpourings—he had always marvelled a little at the temperament that found in these a relief—and now

because an old lady had wakened forgotten memories of his mother in him, he had talked about himself for an hour, and had given quite a false impression about himself too. For, after all, what cared he for the hatred of an old fool like Lord Heatherleigh? Hard words never hurt a man, and was he not quite able to endure their burden?

As for the other subject on which their talk had touched—Challice sat up in bed with a sudden frown as he suffered once more that sting of angry bitterness with which he had repudiated all dreams of wedded life. What, again! After years of peace and even of utmost indifference to an old pain, was it to waken up and torment him at this hour? And why, now of all times, and here of all places, unless it were that his mind, or his imagination, or his soul, or whatever it was, took a

mean advantage over his body and seized its moment of weakness to renew the attack? Why now? Challice asked the question with a vehemence he could not justify, even to himself; yet, perhaps, he was not so very set upon the answer, for sleep came first and he surrendered himself at its appeal. Sleep the healer.

There was not in the county a pleasanter family party than that which gathered in the old-fashioned drawing-room that evening about eight o'clock.

Challice, duly dressed by Dick, had, after all, been sternly forbidden to present himself at dinner, but he had taken his meal in solitary state at a little table drawn up before the drawing-room hearth, and he had been waited on as if he were a royal personage. Dick had skirmished back and forward, leaving the barest limits for

his own meal; old Mr. Arabin trotted in to recommend another potato; there was wine sent with the laird's own commands laid on the consumer, and finally who should appear with the dessert but Venetia herself, a young Ceres of the springtime, with her offering of fruits and flowers?

There never was a young man made so much of as this hero of the wounded hands, whose fame had been so bruited forth that even that great "stoup of the kirk," Dr. Watson, had called to see him, but most of all to take a hand at whist, for he dearly loved a rubber.

The group divided itself quite naturally into old and young. The old people, four wrinkled faces of oddly varying eagerness, gathered about the card table; Challice in an easy chair not far from the piano, where Venetia sang low not to disturb the players, while Dick turned over the leaves.

But Venice had hardly preluded with a chord or two when she turned to Dick, and insisted that he would sing with her.

“Oh, and I suppose you think I didn’t hear anything about the singing lessons in Germany? Well, a little bird whispered the secret to me, and if you think you are going to be let off you are quite mistaken. And I will tell you what it is to be. It is to be ‘Oh, wert thou in the cauld blast,’ because I know they have that air in Germany, and I daresay you have sung it with a great many Fräulein there.”

“And it will remind us of yesterday,” said Challice, “though the blast was anything but ‘cauld.’”

At this “yesterday” Dick and Venice looked at each other, and then she turned to him and said gently :

“But you know the fire was on Monday, and this is Thursday. You have been ill

—and—and”—there was trouble in her tender eyes—“I’m afraid it was all my fault——”

But he would not let her go on. He protested gaily that it was a little bit of a Rip van Winkle experience not to be regretted, for to have slept through four whole days and never known it, was a triumph to boast of (he said nothing of those haunting dreams that had made a long nightmare of them), and the only disappointing part of it was that everything seemed exactly the same, whereas the world ought to have been four days older.

“I shouldn’t have gone so near,” said Venice, still penitent, “but it was David I was laughing at, for to see him tottering through the smoke, and making little dabs at the fire with a switch about six feet long, and then falling back to cough, and choke, and encourage, and scold the others, was

too funny;" she laughed again at the remembrance.

"That fever has done David a lot of good," said Dick gravely; "he's a sadder and a wiser man. I met him just now in the lobby, and he took me aside mysteriously. 'Maister Dick,' he said, 'yon's the Doctor coming up the walk, and if he spiers at you about the muir-burning, you'll just no let on you hear him, for you ken he's a terrible curious body, an' he'll just fash you wi' his questions.'"

"And I hope you promised," said Venetia earnestly, for she understood better than they supposed.

"I said I would think of it," Dick answered, "on condition that there were to be no more 'fevers,'—but you see, Challice is the real hero of the hour, and nobody has so much as thought of David."

"Then in the double character of hero

and invalid—which means that I am to get all my own way—I command you to obey Miss Dundas, and to sing with her immediately.”

So they sang, the boy and the girl, while he lay back and listened, thinking that their voices went well together, for though Dick's second was no great performance, it was redeemed by the meaning he put into it—a sudden pleading that even reached Challice, and made him look up with wonder at the lad. Dick stood tall and straight, his curly head thrown back, his eyes bright with some hidden purpose. Had he ever sang like this with the flaxen-haired Fräulein of the fatherland, and did that subtle pleading that was so plain to the listener touch and thrill Venetia too?

She only said, “That's quite splendid, Dick. And oh, what a modest boy it was to hide all this fine talent—as if Germany

was the only place where one could learn to sing!"

"And who snubbed me before!" cried Dick saucily, "and said I croaked like a raven? I can tell you, Miss Venice, the young ladies of Germany have a great deal more politeness and patience than some young ladies in Scotland——"

"Oh, but I'll be very polite now that you are a great singer, and we'll practise a lot of duets together. As for the patience, I think that will have to come from Mr. Challice."

Mr. Challice of course protested that he was the most long-suffering of men, even in the matter of scales and exercises, and would listen to as many more duets as they liked to give him, and from the card-table there came a growling command in the Doctor's deep bass for "Lewie Gordon."

So Venetia sang alone, and as the sighing refrain :

“ Ohon ! my Hielandman.”

came in at the end of every verse, the listeners seemed to hear the skirl of the pipes as the pipers—a hundred of them abreast—walked proudly before a young Prince, seated on a white charger, marching victoriously on Carlisle. It was all conquest then and easy success, but there was in the song, as there is in all Jacobite music, an undertone of trouble and fear that foreshadowed the quick-coming defeat and disaster. Then, not to sadden them too much, Venetia forsook the minor air, and broke into the triumphant march of “ Wha’ll be King but Charlie !”

“ I knew that would fetch the Doctor,” said Dick aside to Challice, with twinkling eyes, for now the minister threw down his cards, and came striding over to the piano,

drumming an accompaniment with his fingers, and only pausing to take snuff copiously, as was his manner when greatly stirred.

“Bravo, bravo!” he shouted, “that’s the music for me.” He looked round half defiantly on them all from under his knit brows.

“You see,” whispered Dick, “if he doesn’t lug in some allusion to the ’45 on Sunday, it haunts him like the head of Charles I. in Mr. Dick’s discourse, and it fits any text.”

Challice had often heard much finer and more finished music, for he had lived everywhere, and had made it his business to hear all the great stars, but there was a quality in Venetia’s voice that haunted and stirred him as no prima donna had ever done. It had no wealth of capacity or range, but it was what the Scotch call a

“greeting” voice, and it is one which goes best to simplest music, and more than any other has the power to reach and touch the heart.

Afterwards every little event of that evening was remembered by Challice, he hardly knew why, since to any one else its details would surely have seemed commonplace enough.

If a stranger had walked in upon the scene there would have been nothing remarkable for him to see. An old-fashioned, much-used room, with harmoniously faded chintzes covering the spindle-legged furniture ; three old gentlemen mixing what is locally known as “a tumbler,” and discussing with the zest that never forsakes card-players all the hazards of an ended game ; an old lady with white hair and a neat cap carrying a steaming glass full of something, presumably out of the tumbler, to a young

man seated on a sofa, and commanding him to drink it. Nothing very remarkable for any one to discover in all this, nothing more than might be seen at the same hour in a dozen country-houses in the same neighbourhood. But the interest, if there were any, must surely centre in the two youngest people of all, a boy and a girl; the girl sitting on a low chair near the fire, and the boy kneeling beside her and laughingly pouring treasures into her lap—for the girl had a rare grace and fairness, and the boy was a boy whom any mother might be proud to own.

“Oh, why did you buy all these things for me,” said Venice, with reproach in her voice; “I never had so many beautiful things in my life before—and you bought them all for me?”

“As if there was any one else!” said the boy, half under his breath—“and to whom

should Venice send her spoils if not to her own child? Challice chose the Roman mosaics—I don't pretend to know about such things;—it was very kind and self-denying of him, you know, for he took immense delight in the very neat manner in which I was taken in and done for in the course of my bargains. So you must put on the bracelet and necklace, Venice, out of gratitude to him."

"Of course I will," she said, and she bent her neck for Dick to clasp the collar round it, and held up her round arms in the firelight to show off the bracelets.

"Dick was pleased to be very mysterious about their destination, Miss Dundas," said a voice from the sofa, "and he would give me no help at all to guide me, so if they do not please you, please exonerate me."

Ah, was she not pleased? He looked

at her as she sat with the firelight playing fantastically on the rich colours of the Murano glass and the bright beads in her lap ; on her face flushed with girlish pleasure and yet shadowed with doubt and trouble, because Dick had spent so much on her. How unlike she was to the young woman of his imagination, for whose pleasure he had taken Master Dick to Castellani's and lazily chosen a suite that pleased his own fastidious taste, thinking secretly the while that it would very likely be quite wasted on a country maiden. How unlike—how unlike !

Mrs. Arabin came to him then with that steaming glass in her hand, and she paused at his side for a moment to look down on the two so absorbed in each other, so forgetful of every one else, and as she looked, a broad slow smile of love and content lit up her kind homely face.

"A pretty pair," she said, low under her breath, and Challice chimed in eagerly, "Yes, a pretty pair, and made for each other, are they not?"

"These things are not for us to settle, and just to be happy together mayn't be the best for them, but it's the wish of my life," she said simply; and Challice wondered to himself, half angrily, why he felt again that vague sadness at his heart.

II.

“CROMWELL ROAD, W.

“*April* 18—

“MY DEAREST VENICE—Have you been consigning your poor little Dinah to the Arctic regions of your heart, and calling her English, and therefore fickle and forgetful and false? If so, I command you to do penance immediately by writing her a letter at once, for your Dinah has been the goodest of good girls as you will discover if you have patience to read this faithful chronicle of her acts and adventures.

“However, as I am not clever enough to go on talking about myself as if I were somebody else, without mixing up the

pronouns hopelessly, please to consider the impersonal style at an end.

“Well, to begin with, after shivering so long on the brink, behold your Dinah an emancipated woman—one of the great army of toilers and the proud earner of £52 a year. Oh, my dear! how sweet earned money is; I never knew it was so nice before. And how did I come by such wealth? you will ask, and that is just what I am going to tell you, because the story of my experiences may perhaps be of use to the next girl who wants to emancipate herself.

“I began by making a list of all the things I thought I could do, and I put at the top of all, ‘I might marry a young gentleman, and then it would be his business to support me whether he liked doing it or not.’ But I very soon put my pen through that, because it is so frightfully unoriginal; it is

just the way every girl begins nowadays, and I thought I might as well leave it to that surplus million who are always trying to achieve this end, and according to the cruel staticians, never will. Besides, my views of marriage are somewhat peculiar and old-fashioned, and I couldn't think of anybody among my acquaintance who was likely to suit them.

"After this step was taken it seemed only a matter of suiting one's fancy, for I got a little book by a lady who calls herself Miss Perseverance Peploe, and she pointed out so many roads to fortune that it was really quite embarrassing which to take, and I kept balancing the merits of a minor food-producer, a concertina-maker, a dentist, a coupon-sorter, a hairdresser, up and down in my mind, till I felt daringly ready to undertake any or all of these professions.

"Pigs and poultry-keeping, by which one

lady handsomely supported an entire family, had almost irresistible attractions, but it had sadly to be abandoned, because one must sacrifice something for the privilege of living in Cromwell Road, and in my case it had to be pigs. Minor food-producers, on whom I next fixed my desires (if it weren't too execrable I'd call them minor fib-producers), turned out on investigation to be horticulturists and arboriculturists, and they begin by stating that they want a large freehold farm with a secured capital and an organised staff of instructors. I don't know whether they expect every one of the pupils to bring a farm and an organised staff with her, but as nothing was said about an immediate income that had to be given up.

“My dear, by this time my spirits were sinking so low that I don't think even concertina-making would have cheered

them, and I had dark thoughts of becoming a dentist or a hairdresser, if only to inflict a little of my own pain on other people. I'm afraid I lost all the faith that was left in me, after that food-production disappointment, in Miss Perseverance Peploe, when I found her urging emigration upon me—for when she spoke of girls who have had no special bent or training, didn't she mean me? And I wonder how merely 'to suffer a sea change' is to make me any cleverer? I thought the suggestion cruel, especially since the colonies have so rudely proclaimed that they don't want any more of our incompetence, and are shipping us back as fast as we land. Then she insisted that before I went—if I wanted to keep my foot on shore when I got there—I must first learn thoroughly how to scrub, iron, and clear starch, cook and bake and milk, keep a house and make the clothes

of a family ; and do you think after acquiring all these accomplishments I am going to waste them prodigally on a new country ? Miss Peploe, you were half-a-crown's worth of disappointment to me, and in case you might mislead some other poor girl if I put you on the shelf among the guide-books, I consigned you to the flames.

“Are you tired of me, you dear Venetia, and of my evolutionary progress towards complete happiness, or do you want to hear the rest of my story ? Well, I'm afraid the next step I took wasn't at all original, since it only meant looking carefully at the advertisement sheets of all the newspapers William subscribes for and never reads. And there I saw that most alluring invitation, to persons of either sex, to pocket £2 a week by the mere sacrifice of one's leisure moments ; £2 a week—that means £100 a year (not counting the

fortnight's holiday I mean to have with you), and yet there are people who need to be asked and even persuaded to take it! And—as I represented the matter to myself—as all my time is spare time, and I can devote the whole of it to this easy and honest business, instead of the mere rims and margins that other people are asked for, why may I not earn four hundred instead of one? Such Alnaschar-like visions possessed me that there was no rest for me till I had enrolled myself as one of this honest sister and brotherhood.

“Well, it was perhaps a very bold thing to do, but people who want to work must pocket their finer feelings. I put on the very plainest bonnet I possess—an old black thing you wouldn't know me in—and I ran off there and then to the address given in the city. You see I thought some of that surplus million of girls might

be wanting to make £100 a year easily and honestly too, and it seemed a pity to lose time by writing. How frightfully selfish one gets, to be sure, when one wants to be emancipated! My only hope and desire, as I was carried citywards by the underground, was to be the very first of that clamorous million. And I was the first; perhaps the rest had confided their wishes to the post; anyhow there was no one in the little bit of an office but a young man with a shaven face and red hair and most disagreeable light-coloured eyes, who was smoking and reading a newspaper, I think. I can't be very sure of all the details, because it was my first experience of a business interview, and if my present feelings continue it is likely to be my last. I wonder if all city men are like this one? I don't believe it, for I've a great respect for city men. He didn't help me one

particle, not even to ask what I wanted ; he kept on smoking and twiddling a paper-knife, and staring at me with a horrid smile in his pale eyes, and so instead of the calm and majestic deportment I had arranged with myself to wear, I found myself stuttering and stammering something like this :—

“ ‘Your advertisement—two pounds a week—easy and honest’—as if it were some refrain I had learned by heart and half forgotten again !

“ ‘Waal, I guess you’re pretty spry, ain’t you ? I reckon you’ll do for us,’ he said at last.

“ ‘I’m very spry indeed,’ I answered, having nobody to do the praising for me, ‘and if you’ll tell me what there is to do I’ve no doubt I can do it.’

“ Oh, Venice, do you hate me for my boldness ? It was a kind of desperate courage, and it came to me oddly enough

in a flash, as I pictured Fanny lying on a couch in that sombrely lighted little room of hers, gazing up at the Botticelli above her. If it could have been revealed to Fanny at that instant where I was, I almost think she would have died of horror, and the thought of her unsuspecting trust, and her comfortable worship of that ugly picture, so stirred the humorous side of me that I could have laughed aloud. Of course I didn't, for I was listening with all my might to the explanation.

"I needn't give it you in his own words—I despair when I try to render his Americanisms in their purity; but the mystery of the advertisement somehow hung upon a stove—a 'patent, self-acting, unbreakable, non-combustioning, economical, everlasting stove!'

"'But what am I to do with it?' I asked stupidly, not seeing how even a stove

deserving of so many laudatory adjectives was to bring me in £2 a week.

“‘I guess you’ve got some friends, now, and go out some into society?’ he asked; and this irrelevant question so took me by surprise that I owned I had and did.

“‘Waal, if you conclude to join us, you can recommend this yer everlastin’ little stove to them, and’—and, in fact, to cut a long story short, I was to sell his stoves; and if I could secure a sufficient amount of buyers the commission he would give me would amount to £2 a week, or £200, for the matter of that, as he put it easily, if I were only ‘spry’ enough.

“Well, I got out of that office somehow; I think I said feebly that I was sure my friends were all provided with stoves already; I think, too, that he pursued me to the door with that string of adjectives

respecting his own particular stove, and warned me to think again before throwing away a fortune. I only know that my oppressed spirit did not recover itself till I got once more to Cromwell Road, and that Fanny seemed less silly than I am apt to think her for sticking to Botticelli and blue china.

“For weeks and weeks I never opened a newspaper, and the thought that Fanny might read the story of my exploit in my face so haunted me that I did everything she wanted me to do, and I daresay I should very soon have fallen into the twaddle of her set, and even got to respect myself in a blue-green tea-gown without any waist, if I had not chanced to see a little notice one day in *The Standard* that changed my views of life. It was headed Lady-Help, and there was nothing at all particular in the wording of it, except just at the

end where it said—'Nobody with a fringe need apply.'

"There was something about this reservation that took my fancy. Here was some one who had an ideal and a standard of her own—was there any chance that I might fit it? Somehow the courage came to me to try, for I could honestly meet the condition, as you know—in spite of the Brotherhood—I've never cultivated a bush to cover my forehead. The address given was just across the Park, in one of those big, gloomy Bayswater Squares, so that my courage hadn't time to evaporate before I had got to the house and was actually in the drawing-room.

"The lady who wanted the Help (that's me) was rather old and of comfortable bulk, and she had the white hair that is so surprisingly rare nowadays; one's grandmother used to grow gray about sixty, but

she turns yellow now, or black. My old lady wore a dress of bright purple silk, which would have been most refreshing after the sickly half-tints Fanny loves, if she hadn't had green ribbons in her cap. But I hate myself for this criticism (and, after all, it would have been a perfectly correct combination fifty years ago), for it was such a good-natured face that the ribbons framed. And she seemed to take to me—well, a good deal. 'You're the fifty-fifth, my dear,' she said, 'and you're the only one that wears the hair as I like it to be worn;' and when I told her that I lived in Cromwell Road, she seemed to think that was quite character enough for anybody.

" 'Job' (that's her husband, I suppose) 'and me think of flitting there some day,' she said, 'but we're feeling our way.'

"She has a lingering hint of Scotchness

in her tone—though she told me she had lived almost all her life in Australia—that took me back to the village and you at a leap; and if I had needed any more drawing to her that would have done it. We very soon settled everything, though I suppose it will be business-like to make a few mutual inquiries for form's sake. Then the question of salary turned up, and this most delightful old lady asked me what I would like. I was going to suggest £20, for that affair of the stoves gave me a fright, when she timidly asked me if I thought £50 would do to begin with? Then she had another inspiration, and said quite gleefully:

“ ‘We'll call it £52, that's just a pound every week of the year, and it'll be so easily counted.’ And I agreed that it would not tax our arithmetical powers too severely.

“She sealed it all with a kiss, and I came away promising to return and begin my duties in a fortnight. These, by the way, are very vague; but I think a part of them is to help my dear old Mrs. Murray to ‘flit’ into the coveted atmosphere of Cromwell Road.

“I was so happy that I could have danced downstairs. And I hadn’t compassion enough to pity another lady-help whom I met coming up, because she had only plastered down her fringe with bandoline, and such base deceptions shouldn’t be encouraged.

“The dreadful part of the business was breaking the news to Fanny. It is horrible to feel as if you were a charge of dynamite, or a torpedo set to demolish the feelings of your family. Poor Fanny has taken it very badly, and even Botticelli doesn’t console her; he is a broken reed at a time like

this. She lies and moans, and says I have destroyed the harmony of her life. William, who reflects Fanny as Fanny reflects him, is quite as irreconcilable. I feel like a traitor, or—an ugly duckling, or—anything else you like to call me, so long as you believe me always to be,

“ Your happy and loving

“ DINAH.”

III.

THE few inquiries which Dinah thought it prudent to make were quite satisfactory, as far as Mrs. Murray was concerned.

The late Mr. Murray began life with the proverbial shilling, as he loved to boast, and ended it with a handsome fortune made as an Australian squatter; a fortune which, more by accident than design, had been left entirely at his widow's disposal. Possibly, while still in the flesh, he was neither a very lovable nor estimable person; but that time was now sufficiently remote for his memory to have undergone the gentle transformation that makes of a sinner a saint, quotable on all occasions.

There is nothing consciously dishonest in the process, and our subtlest mental analysis only leaves us with the conviction that it is a perfectly and pardonably natural one ; it was, at any rate, more natural to this good lady to mourn her husband by constant references to his opinions and tastes than to wear a load of crape, and to stint her inborn appetite for the gayer side of life.

It had been the late Job's expressed aim—and in this, at least, he did not differ from the rest of the shilling people—to make his money bags a stepping-stone to society ; and his widow felt it a sacred obligation to fulfil his wishes in this matter. "Job expects it of me," she used to say, as if he still dominated her life ; "he would be sorely vexed if I stored the money in the bank, and had nothing to show for it."

Like a prudent general, she began with the outworks ; some one had told her that Islington was peopled out of Scotland ; she came home from Australia and settled in that quarter where it merges into the genteeler Highbury, and which she stormed and took with ease. In Highbury you do not even need to have an immense fortune ; if you have only more than anybody else, and are willing to spend it, every door is speedily set open at your approach. When there was nobody left to conquer, Mrs. Murray travelled westwards. Now, to be a perfect strategist, she ought, of course, at once to have abandoned all her friends of the north, made a mystery of her previous address, and descended upon her new world as a millionaire fresh from some distant quarter—America, if possible. But instead of being diplomatic, she was only kind-hearted, simple, and sincere, and en-

tirely lacking in all the arts of conquest. Thus it came about that her visiting list did not contain a single new name, and that her only guests were the old acquaintances of Highbury who came westwards in omnibuses to lunch and dinner, and on little visits of a day or a week, sure always of a welcome.

Dinah Kenyon, who quickly fell into the most natural and pleasant relations with her new friend, soon discovered all this for herself, and it gave her unfeigned delight ; after the sickly Botticellian atmosphere it was like a breath of Venetia's mountain air to come among these unlettered folks. The trouble with many people who have risen, as the phrase goes, is that they always are what they have been ; but here was at least one person who did not want to escape from the circumstances of her early life ; who was neither proud of them

nor ashamed of them ; who simply accepted them.

“ Nearly all the women I ever met before tried to be something they were not ; this one is what she is. Naturalness must conquer the world in the long run,” said Dinah to herself ; “ it is so refreshingly rare ; and if you are rich into the bargain, the balance is wholly in your favour ;” and thereupon this daring lady-help entertained democratic dreams of a society where Highbury and Hyde Park should clasp hands, and east and west embrace each other. It was a beautiful idea—it was an inspiration, and this high task was hers to carry out !

Though Dinah loved to call herself by the name of help, her duties were not arduous. Indeed, they were much too easy to please her. She began with coming down the first morning wearing a small

starched muslin apron and a cap, and asked if she might open the door to visitors ; but Mrs. Murray had a footman whose sole duty it was to answer the summons of the Highbury ladies ; to do Mrs. Murray's back hair, which was her next proposal, was to encroach on the duties of Parker, the primmest of lady's-maids, and as there was a person specially salaried to sew on buttons and strings, Dinah at last reached the conclusion that her mission was to sit in the drawing-room and talk. This did not look very like emancipation, and at first she suffered some depression of spirits, but she discovered a way of consoling herself.

"It's only a change of name," she said, "but, dear Mrs. Murray, if you forget again—as you did yesterday when you introduced me to Mrs. Brimble—to tell people that I'm your companion, I'll go back to Cromwell Road to-morrow."

This threat was so alarming that Mrs. Murray promised obedience ; and Dinah had the exquisite delight of being covertly snubbed by the Highbury ladies, an art of which the sex are acknowledged mistresses. How is it done ? Where lies the secret of it ? No man has ever yet been able to discover it ; but Dinah Kenyon knew, and it gave her a gleeful pleasure to be the subject of it now. This was to be a worker in good earnest ; an amateur who “ helps ” or “ companions ” of her own pleasure and for her amusement is never snubbed even by Islington ; she is praised and petted, but snubbed—never.

“ How did your sister get into society ? ” Mrs. Murray asked innocently one day shortly after this compact had been made. She spoke of society always as of some paradise reserved for the favoured few, who had special license to enter it.

“ I think our fortunes began with a teapot,” said Dinah demurely.

“ Do you mean that your sister-in-law gave tea-parties ?” asked Mrs. Murray eagerly ; “ we often had meat-teas in High-bury, and the gentlemen came to supper, you know, later—when the shops were shut.”

“ Oh no,” said Dinah, “ our teapot wasn’t half so useful. William picked it up somewhere, and as it was rather a rare specimen of its kind, one or two people, with whom teapots were an article of faith, came to see it. Then we got other old bits, saucers and cracked caudle cups, and so on,—you see the taste was in its infancy then, and confined to an ardent few who went about adoring at each other’s houses, and talking a mysterious language of their own, which drew other people’s attention at last, and made *them* talked about in

turn. And once you are talked about, you know, your path is plain."

"Well, if that's all," said Mrs. Murray in a perplexed voice, "there's china enough in the cupboard and some of it old too, though why it should be better because it's cracked I don't understand."

"I think it's rather late now," said Dinah gently; "people are tired of the fancy since everybody has adopted it. What really gave us a push was getting to know Mr. Septimus Bolde. He is a poet, you know, and an artist, and a critic—a little of everything, indeed. He writes *Rondeaux* and *Vilanelles*, for instance."

"What are they?"

"Oh, I don't know. Puzzles in which the words chase each other up and down, and don't mean anything. Poems without any subject, and subjects without any poetry," said Dinah, with off-hand criti-

cism. This was rather severe upon Mr. Bolde, who had published a sparkling and crackling little volume of *Vers de Société*, wherein, moreover, was to be found a ballade into which the refrain of "Dinah" and "Blue China" was very neatly woven.

"Having got to know Mr. Bolde—and we owed the honour of his acquaintance to our teapot—we were all right. It was enough to say "when Mr. Bolde was with us to-day," or, "as Mr. Bolde dines with us to-morrow," to get invitations everywhere. Then it was he who got us our Botticelli."

"Is he a poet too?" asked Mrs. Murray, with profound interest.

"No," said Dinah, with gentle seriousness, "he was a Tuscan artist, you know, and he died long ago—so long ago that it's quite time for him to be worshipped now. I'm sure I don't grudge it to him

since I'm out of it all and not expected to join any more in the worship, for I don't think he could have been at all appreciated in his own day, poor man."

"Couldn't we have one of his pictures?"

"Well, you see," said Dinah reluctantly, "that's a little past too. We might do something more original. You are strong enough to do without teapots and pictures, and it would be a delightful change just to ask people to meet each other, and not each other's jars and madonnas."

"But this Mr. Bolde,"—Mrs. Murray's voice had a disappointed ring,—“do you think we can do without him?"

"We'll ask him to come," said Dinah, with dancing eyes; "I'll get William to invite him, and he'll bring some other young men. There's Mr. Papillon, his disciple and the better man of the two, I think he would come." Dinah smiled as if

she could have put it much more strongly if she chose. "We'll ask the Brimbles, and the Sharmans, and all your other friends, and to see the way they will react upon each other will be something quite beautiful. Dear Mrs. Murray, you have a splendid mission before you! Think of it being your destiny to demolish caste and abolish cliques—to do away with the abomination of sets!"

"Well, I'm sure Mrs. Brimble will be pleased," said the good lady, who could not quite follow Dinah in this distant flight, "for she was saying only yesterday that she was quite tired of meeting the same people, and she thought I might have done better by this time. I could have thought it was Job who spoke." She sighed. "I'm afraid he's disappointed too."

"Give me one week," said the com-

panion solemnly, "just one week, and you'll see!"

This was the origin of an attempt to create a salon on new principles. Like most innovating ventures, it was not cheered by immediate success. William, appealed to by his sister, was dishearteningly icy; there was a meeting of the Botticellian Brotherhood for the special evening and hour fixed on for Mrs. Murray's first reception, and was it to be conceived that any sane person could hesitate between the two?

"There's Fanny," said Dinah, rather faintly, for she had suffered at the hands of the Brotherhood all her maiden life, "she might come."

"You can ask her if you like," said Fanny's husband, hastening away and thus escaping encounter for the moment. He quite disapproved of the step Dinah had

taken in leaving his roof, but perhaps in the blameless and subdued atmosphere of his home, he missed somewhat the young girl's saucy defiance and her merry laughter. At any rate, he did not wish to quarrel with her, though Fanny was always saying she had disgraced the family name.

"Never mind," said Dinah, who did not ask Fanny, "I know of another way." It seemed to her quite worth while to endure a little disappointment and delay considering the great end to be gained by patience. For was it not a great end to break down this middle wall of partition that divides class from class ?

"We are all of one clay," said Dinah. "I suppose we expect to acknowledge each other in heaven when we get there ; it's like people travelling as guests to the same house in the same carriage, and never speaking to each other by the way. It

needs some outside force to break the spell—*we* are to be the break-down—the accident that unloosens their tongues. It's the ridiculous arbitrariness of the whole thing that is so absurd!" this young democrat went on; "who was it that settled the ticket question? The poorest scribbler in verse or dabbler in colours has an unquestioned right of entry—the man who makes your beer may walk in unchallenged, but the man who bakes your bread must content himself outside. Tea, if you sell it in big enough chests, and can get a nobleman's son to set the seal of his approval on the trade, is all right, but tea in pounds and half-pounds is hopelessly wrong."

"The Brimbles are quite in a big way," said Mrs. Murray anxiously; "it's not a shop, you see, it's a store. But what I want is the very best people that can be had—it's what's expected of me."

She spoke with that mental reference to her husband's wishes that governed all her actions. "It would be a pity to have all that money and not have the best."

"And you shall have the best—only the best are not always those who have climbed highest." Dinah smiled to herself.

She was still wondering how to coalesce these differing elements—the bread and cheese of Islington with the confectionary of Bayswater—when she suddenly remembered a husband and wife who had come sometimes to the Botticellian evenings in Cromwell Road; one of those good-natured and pliant couples who go everywhere, and fitting in with everybody's idiosyncracies are never unwelcome. To them she made her next appeal.

"I know that if I asked you to go down and give a lecture with lime-lights

to the roughs at the east-end, you would think it much less odd," she said; "indeed since Lady Jemima Croker sang at the Penny Readings in — Street, it has become quite fashionable to be philanthropic, but I'm afraid our evenings won't become very quickly fashionable—unless you help us."

"What is it you want us to be, eh?" asked Mr. Waldron, with whom Dinah was a favourite; "apostles to the middle class? Why, my dear, they wouldn't thank you; they would resent it as an impertinence; they have a set of their own; they don't want us. Why, they've the best of everything. I was in a furniture dealer's the other day, to look at a cabinet, you know, and I'm blessed if he hadn't a footman to open the door, and everything in tiptop style. And do you suppose that man would care to be asked here"—he

looked round his wife's charming morning-room as he spoke. "I daresay his wife's boudoir is ten times more gorgeous, and his cellar much better stocked than mine."

"Yes, he would," said Dinah bravely; "can he command the finest intellects and the most cultured minds just because of his cellar, and would a great philosopher come all the way from America just to shake hands with him, do you think?" she went on, with sly allusion.

"Yes," said Mrs. Waldron, laughing, "if he had written the pamphlet my husband wrote I've no doubt he would be visited by the great philosopher from America."

"Well, my Highbury ladies haven't written any pamphlets, but I know they would like to climb a step higher—we all do. I've no doubt I should be as proud as a peacock if Lady Jemima found me

necessary to her garden-parties. At any rate," she went on inconsequently, "it's expected of my dear Mrs. Murray, and I can't bear to have her snubbed or disappointed."

They laughed at her, but Mrs. Waldron promised to call, and being a lady of a kind heart, and moreover of a sufficiently secure social standing to do what she thought best, she induced some of her acquaintances to do the same, and to accept the invitations which soon followed. "If you are only rich enough," as Dinah had shrewdly remarked, "you can accomplish anything you set your mind on ;" but you can compass your end much more quickly if you have a Mrs. Waldron to help you. For that pleasant lady had the genius of tact, which is as the oil to the machinery of life, and makes it run sweetly. She knew all the difficulties of the task Dinah had set

her. "It's such a little step," Dinah had urged when pleading her cause. "That is just what makes it so difficult," the elder lady had answered, smiling; "my dear, it would have been ever so much easier if it had been a big stride!"

Mrs. Brimble, for her part, considered that there was no stepping up in the question at all, only an affronting level not worth the price of a cab to come and see. She came wearing a solid splendour of satin, with a troop of daughters (who were only a very little less well dressed and a very little less well mannered than the girls it had been Dinah's wont to meet), and even Mrs. Waldron's charms were lost upon her. But she was a useful person to answer questions, and Mrs. Brimble was quite as curious as if she had been a duchess with a select "set" of her own.

"Who's that?" she asked Mrs. Waldron, pointing a fat forefinger at Mr. Papillon, who made a very harmonious study in black and white, and had the air of a Greek statue in evening dress as he leaned carelessly against the wall.

Mr. Papillon's dress was the result of most careful thought; his trousers were delightful, and so were his satin stock and his fob.

Mrs. Brimble supposed he wore his cuffs turned over his coat sleeves to keep his linen clean, and there was nothing against his having a pocket-handkerchief for show and another for use; Mr. Brimble, who took snuff, always carried two pocket-handkerchiefs.

"What does he do?" she demanded at the close of her survey.

"He has a thousand a year for being gentlemanly," said Mrs. Waldron, unable

to resist this thrust ; " don't you think he succeeds very well ? "

Mrs. Brimble turned her dull greenish eyes on the speaker. " I won't have Mariar and Em'ly introduced to him," she said, just as if she had been the duchess ; " a fine figure of a man is all they'll think of, but a thousand a year is what their father wouldn't hear of."

Mrs. Waldron promised that the young ladies should be kept from temptation, but even this assurance did little to raise her in Mrs. Brimble's esteem.

" She isn't even an Honourable," she remarked, confiding her disappointment to Mrs. Sharman when Mrs. Waldron had skimmed away to soothe some other aggrieved Islingtonian, " and, so far as I can make out, there isn't a title in the room. And that gown, my dear, didn't cost the half of yours and mine. I thought

Mary Murray would have had more to offer us before bringing us so far. The girls might just as well have gone to the Tomkins' dance; they would have had much better fun, poor things, and young Tomkins is just wild about our Em'ly."

"Emily is the prettiest girl in the room," said Mrs. Sharman, whose own girls were safely married; but Mrs. Brimble—a privileged grumbler—was not to be appeased.

"What's the good," she asked snappishly, "when there's no one to admire her?"

But all this happened on the first evening, when even the most gracious care and tact could not compel things to go smoothly.

Dinah begged and implored and finally prevailed with her friend to give up a second Friday to the cause. She beat up a strong contingent of her old friends; she enlisted William and Fanny, less reluctant now that Mrs. Waldron had given in her adhesion;

she decorated the great, gaunt Bayswater reception-rooms; she dressed herself in her prettiest gown, and would have superintended Mrs. Murray's toilet too but that something held her back. Mrs. Murray's dress was the expression of her own healthy, simple nature; let the Botticellians shiver and be pained as they would, Dinah would have no hand in subduing its cheerfulness.

It was a proud moment for the lady-help when her old friends came to this salon constructed on such very revolutionary principles. They came understanding that their hostess was an eccentric person, but who had the best champagne that could be bought for money (a great virtue that, in a woman), and they found her not eccentric at all, though shudderingly crude in dress, but only so simple-minded that she did not appear to see anything incongruous in asking the disciples of the higher culture to

meet the people who sold boots and sugar and other such vulgar necessities.

There was something deliciously naïve about it, they said to each other, loving a new sensation, and Dinah looked on with a malicious pleasure in her dark eyes. They had so much to learn, these elegant Botticellians; hitherto they had admitted to their consciousness only the two extremes of life; the cultured, as represented by themselves, and the squalid, to whom for the moment it was the fashion to stoop, and here was a whole world—the lower middle, as it is phrased—as unfamiliar to them as if it had hitherto pulsed its life out on another planet. The beating heart of the nation, its strength and its stay; so many of us spring from it, so few of us rise above it, or if we do, are so traitorously ashamed of it!

“Inartistic,” she could hear the Botticel-

lians call it, a canvas of crowded, awkward figures that added nothing to the picturesqueness of life—Dinah's heart burned within her as she imagined the familiar phrases. She looked about her: here were girls as pretty, and hardly less well educated than those who move in a higher rank—were they incapable of love and devotion—of sacrifice? Young men a great deal more earnest if less well tailored, and probably much more useful to their country than these her friends; was there here no room for heroism—for the patient practice of many virtues—for tragedy, for pathos?

Perhaps all this was a little hard on the Botticellians, whose prejudices were, after all, only those of ordinary men of the world, sanctioned by ancient custom; and Dinah had yet to learn that the best way of helping the people she wished to befriend was not by sweeping away all class

distinctions and hereditary advantages, and reducing everybody to one level ; nevertheless, being an ardent little person, it seemed to her as if she had gained a very fine victory when she saw Mr. Hector Papillon dancing with a young girl whose papa sold candles—Mr. Hector Papillon, who was the mirror for other young men to dress themselves by, and who bore himself much as the Apollo Belvidere might be supposed to do if he could be prevailed on to quit his pedestal for a London drawing-room.

Dinah herself did not dance, because she was a companion, as she delighted to style herself, and therefore a working woman whose frivolous days were over, and she had besides caused jealous pangs enough already by her delightful skill in dress. She had a natural genius for all matters of the toilet, and so far subscribed to the creed of the Brotherhood as to re-

spect the lines of her body, and recognise that nature meant her to have a waist.

The "daring simplicity" of the classical perhaps needs one to be young and pretty, and Dinah was both : she was thus rather a marked figure in spite of her willingness to invite snubbings, and it was not long before a gentleman, wandering by himself about the crowded rooms, and examining the company curiously through a double eye-glass, singled her out for his approval.

It appeared to give this gentleman a great deal of satisfaction, when on nearer approach he discovered that this young girl—who did not need to stick her elbows out in order to aid her oppressed lungs—was already an acquaintance, and he came up to her with the easy bearing of one who looks for a welcome.

"This is a very unexpected pleasure," he said, placing himself before Dinah, who

was bending over a Canterbury, crowded with music sheets, and holding out his hand. The voice which had something remotely familiar to her ear made her heart leap, but she did not look up.

"When Papillon got me to come with him to this—a—rather odd assemblage," the speaker went on, "he did not prepare me for the happiness of meeting Miss Dundas."

Dinah straightened herself, ignoring the outstretched hand—indeed, both her own were occupied with the sheets she had selected from the pile. She knew now to whom the voice belonged.

"I think you have made a mistake," she said, and she did not blush either! "I am Dinah Kenyon, Mrs. Murray's companion."

The gentleman bowed, but there was incredulity, or rather an impertinent assump-

tion of knowing better in his air—at least so it seemed to Dinah, and any explanation she might have been willing to give him was from that moment denied him.

“I am glad of this opportunity to tell you,” he said, “that your message and token were safely delivered into Dick’s hands. I heard of their arrival myself from Dick, who was, indeed, then on his homeward way. But of course his movements are much better known to you than they can be to me.”

“I do not know any one of that name,” said Dinah, with a touch of hauteur. “Will you please allow me to pass? Mrs. Murray expects me to sing.”

A moment later, when Mr. Papillon was retiring with an air of noble martyrdom on his handsome face from escorting a young lady (in a pea-green dress, and with no

waist to mention) to a seat, he was somewhat suddenly arrested.

“Who is that girl at the piano?” said an excited voice in his ear.

Mr. Hector Papillon freed his arm gently from the emphatic clasp.

“Ah yes,” he murmured, “I don’t wonder that you ask. She is one of *us*. You find the result good? Her dress-maker, you see, went through a regular course under our supervision. She passed an examination in classical drawing and anatomy, and modelled the Milo Venus in clay before we allowed her to put scissors to stuff.”

“I don’t want to know about her dress-maker,” said his interlocutor, with ill-concealed impatience; “I want to know her name.”

“Miss Kenyon, Miss Dinah Kenyon,” said Papillon mildly.

“ And is it true that she is Mrs. Murray’s companion ? ”

But at this moment Dinah’s voice rose above the talk of the room carrying the notes of a ballad to them, and the poet silenced his companion with a pained “ Hush ! ”

When the song was over he went to the singer’s side.

“ Thank you,” he said, “ you have given me my only pleasure to-night.”

“ Do you find our party so dull, then ? ” said Dinah, smiling.

“ I brought Bolde,” he answered evasively, “ but he said the ladies’ dresses hurt his eyes, and he went away.”

“ I will have shades put on all the lights, and he might wear smoke-coloured spectacles. Mr. Papillon,” she dropped her light tone, “ I want you to come again. I want you to explore this undiscovered

country with me. It will repay you in the end."

He, too, dropped something that had been in his manner before. "I will come," he said simply.

Some hours later, when the lights were out and the company fled, Dinah was with Mrs. Murray in her bedroom. She had thrown off her pretty semi-Greek dress, and she knelt on the rug making a screen of her loose hair to shield her from the fire. The room was sparsely lighted, and thus Dinah's grave expression was hidden from her friend. They had been talking cheerfully enough over their success, and why should she all at once be grave?

"Dinah," said Mrs. Murray slowly, after a long pause, "I want the very best that can be got; it's what Job expects of me."

"Yes," said Dinah, without impatience.

“And it must be the best *every way*,” Mrs. Murray went on, a little labouredly. “Now there was a young man here to-night—and, my dear, if he’s a friend of yours, you must forgive me—but he didn’t seem to me the kind of young man I want, though he was dressed like Mr. Bolde, and seemed to be a great friend of his.”

“I know,” said Dinah, breathing quickly, “was his name Merrit? Did he speak about me?”

“He said—and if he’s a friend of yours, you’ll not take it ill of me, my dear; he said—did I know you well? Because he thought it was his painful duty to tell me that he knew you before under another name.”

“It’s quite true,” said Dinah, struggling with a smile; “were you very much shocked?”

“I said to him, because I couldn't think of a better way at the minute, ‘Sir, she's just as dear to me by any name she likes to call herself.’”

“Did you say that?” Dinah possessed herself of one of Mrs. Murray's plump hands, and kissed it. “Well, he's horrid, and no friend of mine, but it is all my own fault, and I daresay I gave him the right to be impertinent and to doubt me, though, if he had been a gentleman, he would have respected my wish to pass over our first meeting.” Then, half penitent, half laughing, she told the story of her change of name with Venetia, and all that it led to, on the night of the Professor's banquet.

“I was afraid, you see, that Venice, my dear Venice, might mistake her heart or her inclinations, or other people's intentions for her, and I wanted that young

Dick—who seemed from all accounts to be a nice fellow—to have a fair chance, just in case he might want it ; I thought it was doing him a good turn to enlighten him, but I'll never, never meddle in such an affair again !”

“ I wish we could help this Dick,” said Mrs. Murray, who immediately felt a most benevolent desire to meddle. “ If he were poor, now——”

“ Oh, but I don't think he is, and he may have pled his own cause successfully by this time for all I know. I think,” she went on after a meditative pause, “ I'll give Mr. Papillon a hint not to bring that Mr. Merrit here again. I'll get quite an accomplished fibber if I meet him often, and I'm not going to make a ‘moral tradition’ of that sort for anybody to inherit !”

“ Well, I want only the best,” said Mrs.

Murray again, with that slow recurrence to a fixed habit of thought. She sighed as she unclasped her bracelets. "If we could only get a lord to come, I think Mrs. Brimble would be content."

"I only once met a lord to speak to," said Dinah smiling, "and I think if you want *him*, you must first coax my Venice here!"

IV.

How would it have been if fortune had not decreed that he should hurt his hands on the memorable day of the heather-burning? Owen Challice asked himself more than once. Should he have accepted the hospitality so cordially extended to him for a night, or perhaps two, and then gone upon his way, carrying with him a pleasant picture put aside for future reference?

He must still go, and he might still carry that picture with him, but time had graven its lines more deep, and he felt as if it must henceforth make a part of himself.

What most struck him about this

household of which he so oddly came to make one, was the entire simplicity of their life and thought. The scientific spirit of the times in which we live seemed never to have wandered their way. They had no sense of hopeless endeavour after light and certainty, no dread of darkness and void beyond the margin of this life ; they took every day as it came, newborn to them, with a serene and robust enjoyment of all the good things it brought, and for them the light beyond burned clear and unwavering—the light that shone upon the world eighteen hundred years ago.

Mr. Dundas was a man whose hair had long grown gray, all the ardour and the passion of his life lay years behind him, and only rarely, very rarely, did the ghost of that old past intrude upon his present content. What the hurry of a town might

have made of a man of his temperament remains doubtful, but the country had moulded him into an excellent farmer. He was much out in the weather ; deeply interested in crops, in young plantations, in all that belongs to sheep ; he subscribed to a conservative newspaper, and fell asleep over it in his dim old library ; was a staunch churchman and an upright elder in the little kirk ; apt to grow testy and impatient, with much consultation of his watch towards dinner-time, but abundantly genial under the influence of the nightly rubber and his daughter's simple music.

Such had time and inherited tradition made him ; such was time (in spite of the accident of his birth) likely to make Dick. For Dick had carried the charm of this peaceful life out with him into the world, and he had come back able to look Venetia in the eyes and to take her hand

in his. It was an easy world for Dick; he had only to make room in his heart for love, and all that follows in love's train was his. If ever Owen Challice felt envy it was when he looked at the boy and girl together, and heard their laughter gladdening the old house. They trod so plain and sunny a path. He had not found the world very easy. He was a man who had thought a good deal, and who had examined most of the substitutes men have invented in place of the old religion, finding in none of them a safe moral anchorage. Who shall say how good and sanative it was for one who had let the old slip from him without finding it possible to accept the new, who had outlived his early beliefs and had put nothing permanent in their place, to dwell among these simple people who were vexed with no problems; to kneel beside Venetia in

the little loft of the old church, and to feel a brotherhood in her pure prayers ; to share her kindly charities, the little duties, cares, and pleasures that made up her world ?

He never thrust his doubts upon her ; they looked very small in her presence ; she was immeasurably wiser in her loving trust than he in his poor hesitations and limitations. Besides, he knew instinctively that she would shrink from the speculations that had pleased his intellect ; the doctrine of the evolution of humanity ; the immortality, not of the individual but of the race, will never find many disciples among women ; for a woman's heart cries out passionately for a personal life with those she loves, not only here, but hereafter, and no triumph of the coming generations will satisfy its hunger.

“ Are there people who believe that ? ”

she asked him once with wide, surprised eyes—"that we should bear and suffer only that somebody that comes after us may suffer with lesser pangs and be better than we? Oh, but I am not unselfish—like that, I want another life for myself, with everybody I care for here in it. I think if it were to happen that I died first, and left some one I loved behind me, I could not be content even in heaven till he came too."

Owen Challice looked at her curiously. They were sitting out on the hillside, with a young summer world at their feet.

"I believe it," he said simply, and he thought of the Blessed Damozel who leaned over the ramparts of heaven, "and bowed and stooped" to the lover on earth. And that lover left behind—would not he, too, have "a share in the eternal"—a loadstar to draw him on and up?

"Do you think it would be wrong?" she asked gravely.

"Wrong to wish that another should share the best with you?" he smiled. Was she thinking of Dick? Dick, who was all of the earth, who loved her only a little better than the acres she might bring with her? He was always a little unjust to the boy in his thoughts.

She seemed almost to answer his unspoken question, when the next minute she cried out lightly :

"There's Dick—down by the edge of the wood ; I'll race you to him, if you like."

He accepted her challenge, and they flew down together, Venetia arresting herself neatly just short of Dick's outstretched arms, while Challice blundered on till he caught at the support of a tree that blocked his path.

"I haven't run since I was a boy," he

said, panting and recovering his breath by snatches. "Miss Dundas, before I pick up your gauntlet again, I think I'll do a little private practising."

"Well," said Dick, "you might do the Blackhill before breakfast; it's an easy pull. It used to be recommended to me as a sort of shake-down when I couldn't finish my porridge. After that you and Venice might have a try at Carnethy, and I'll stand umpire."

"And precipitate ourselves into the pond."

"Dick, before you drown Mr. Challice and me, I've a plan to propose."

"Say command," said Dick, "it will come to that."

"Oh," she said lightly, "you are not very much concerned in it, and you won't share in it at all unless you are nice, and promise to do just what I tell you."

"I will be nice, and do just what I am told," said Dick, with an air of meekness and humility.

"Mr. Challice has not seen Edinburgh yet, except a distant view of it from the hilltop, and I think he is ready for it now."

"Well, considering that he has seen every other place in the world worth seeing, don't you think you're putting it a trifle strongly, Venice?"

"No, that's just it,"—she lifted a smiling look on Challice, who was standing aside amused. "All those other places are just a preparation—it's always good to see the poorest first, and then it makes the best a new sort of surprise. And you are going to see a city that is like no other place in the world."

"I quite believe it," said Challice.

"Well, I used to think it pretty well suited for larks," said Dick, with mischiev-

ous intent, "and I've a sneaking fondness for a pea-fight yet. But of course, when I am with a tyrannical young lady, all that is forbidden, and when you and I follow in her train, Challice, we are expected to transform ourselves into tourists, with an insatiable appetite for local history and scenery, and an unlimited admiration for everything that belongs to Auld Reekie."

"What you are expected to do, Dick," said Venice severely, "is to hold yourself in readiness for a signal I shall give you, and when the day has come, which is quite the perfect day, you are to get the horses harnessed, and round by ten o'clock in the morning."

"And after that?"

"And after that—you'll see."

"And after that I think it's *you* who will see," said Dick, laughing, but in a rather half-hearted way.

"What do you mean, you bad boy?" said Venice lightly; "have you got a plan too, and are you going to dare to try and hide it from me—your very best friend?"

But Dick seemed to hang back from revealing his little secret, though she took his arm and looked up at him with a look half-imperious, and wholly affectionate, that might have wiled anything out of him.

Chalice let them go on in front, lingering himself among the underwood, which had grown in a few summer weeks out of all likeness to the March barrenness in which he had first seen it dressed. The wood was thick enough now for a pair to be easily lost in it, and he let them go; they had been boy and girl together, and slowly out of that boyhood and girlhood something larger and better was growing. He tried to think of them as lovers—as

man and wife—and he strove to do justice to Dick in his thoughts. He was a good simple lad ; his was a nature to which constancy in friendship, and faithfulness to deeper vows, was easy ; he would develop into a keen farmer like his guardian, he would make a good and tender husband, and if his life had “no discernible echo” beyond the limits of his wife’s property, it would be all the same, an honest and honourable record. And having thus settled Dick’s future—he studiously avoided forecasting Venetia’s lot, except in so far as it was Dick’s—he suddenly made up his mind that it was time for him to go. He had lingered here too long ; he had trespassed shamelessly on his host’s open-handed hospitality ; his hands, which had served as a transparent excuse for delay, were healed long ago ; he had come in the bleak Scotch spring-time, and already, almost before he

was aware, ripe summer had stolen on the land. Having made up his mind to go, it seemed as if it would help to keep his decision from faltering if he went home at once and packed his portmanteau.

He did not wish to risk another meeting with Dick and Venetia, who had forgotten him, so he retraced his steps a little, and skirting the belt of wood came out on the terrace, where, on the first morning, he had stood with Venetia and watched her idly weaving poor Psyche's laurel crown ; while her young boy lover was fighting down his trouble on the hillside, and turning to her for his surest consolation. There was another figure on the terrace to-day, crunching the gravel with a slow step, who turned at Challice's approach and lingered with an unspoken invitation to him. It was the laird, to whom Challice went up quickly ; there had grown up a very

pleasant confidence between him and his host.

"I'm in trouble about Dick," he said, and he slid his arm into the younger man's with a tacit confession of perplexity.

"About Dick?" Challice echoed wonderingly. "I left him not two minutes ago with your daughter——"

"Oh, it isn't that ; that's all as it should be." Mr. Dundas paused, oppressed with his own thoughts.

"Then you wish this—marriage?" Challice asked, feeling as if the question were forced out of him.

"Wish it?"—the laird roused himself. "I've planned it since they were children together. The boy is a good boy and he is all the son I've ever had. He used to talk of it himself when he was a little chap"—he smiled at the recollection—"and if he grew shy of the notion after a bit, I don't

suppose he's ever forgotten it ; anyhow he's quite willing to take it up again now. And my girl has seen no one else she fancies ; it's the most natural thing in the world."

"Oh, most natural."

"That's not the trouble"—the laird paused and drew an absent circle with his stick on the gravel—"he's got some notion in his head that he must work and make his own way in life, because, forsooth, his father wasn't an idler with a fortune ! D—— it!"—he brought his stick down with passionate force—"what can the accident of a man's birth matter to him ? it's what he is, not what his people were that matters. I suppose I've brought him up like a gentleman ? He knew nothing about his own people till the other day, and he was content enough till then to leave himself in my hands. What does he want to go away for now ? And there's

the land—am I to hand it over to the first sprig who fancies he would like my girl's money?" he demanded with vehemence.

"Does Dick want to seek out his own people?" Challice asked, to gain time. He was bewildered by the new light that was thrown on the boy's character. Was this the Dick who took life as a sinecure—the easy-natured, lucky Dick of his imaginings?

"He has no people—his father was a quack doctor; he believed, poor soul, in his own nostrums, though they didn't cure himself. Dick won't touch a penny of the money; he says it was made out of other people's credulity, and might as well have been stolen from their pockets. I don't blame him for that, but what's his objection to the land? If he wants my girl, how is he going to keep her, I'd like to know? Work! why, he'll never make salt

to his porridge up in London! In my day a young fellow would have been grateful for the chance, and thought none the worse of the lass because she was well tochered; if that's the rubbish they teach now in the foreign universities he would never have left Scotland with my will."

He spoke with the irritableness of disappointment. He had so set his heart on this thing; for years, as he had himself grown into love of and fellow-feeling with the soil, he had pleased himself with the thought that Dick would love and understand it too, and that when his own day was over there would yet be some one to care for and cherish the old place. In his trouble at Dick's disclosure he had put from him the remembrance of his own hot youth, and his ardent pulsings after some life less stagnant than this simple round of country duties. Time had carried him onwards

since then, and from what one is it is so difficult to look back and comprehend what one was.

Chalice was very sorry for him. "What does he propose to do?" he asked.

"Do? he has been trained to nothing, and yet he seems to think work will fall into his hands. It's the greatest folly; why couldn't he be content?" That is what the old always say of the young, forgetting that contentment is the victory of one's riper years.

"He will come back to you in time," Chalice said, "and"—he spoke with hesitating reluctance—"I think he is right. The feeling of responsibility is a good thing, and it is well to be true to one's inherited traditions. If we all had that sense of a place in life and a work waiting us, it would be better for some of us." He spoke half to himself, and Mr.

Dundas, busy with the troubled tide of his own thoughts, heard without hearing him.

“Challice,” he said, and he freed his arm to lay it on the young man’s shoulder with wistful appeal—“you are a man of the world—you can see the folly of this—will you speak to the boy?”

Challice paused a hardly perceptible moment. “I will do what I can,” he said. “You mean me to persuade him to stay and to take all the good things you would so generously give him? That ought not to be so very hard,” he smiled quietly. “I was on my way to tell you that I must be leaving you, but if I can serve you, I will stay.”

“That’s right,” said the laird, heartily, grasping his hand, “the boy will listen to you.”

But before Challice could speak, fate

had so arranged the threads of Dick's life that persuasion came too late.

Out there in the wood, new dressed with summer green, Dick had told Venice his story. While they had all held him so carelessly happy and easy-minded, he had been pondering many things in his heart.

"Do you think I am right to go?" he asked rather eagerly, when he had finished his outpouring. "You see, so long as I thought myself born to independence it was different; but I come of working people, or of people who ought to have worked, and there's something binding about the circumstances of one's birth."

He spoke with difficulty; was it not for her sake he wanted to go out into the world, to fight and conquer it, to do something worthy of her, something that would make her a little proud of him, and balance things more evenly between them? She

had so much and he—nothing ; no smallest gift to give her—but if he could make himself a little less unworthy ?

“Where would you go ?” Venice asked. She had seated herself on an uprooted tree that had cleared a way through the living growth by its deathfall, and she was looking up at him with troubled eyes as he stood before her.

“To London. It’s unpatriotic,” he smiled ; “but London has, after all, the best chances.”

“I suppose it’s natural,” she sighed. “Mr. Challice says men are always wanting to venture and to risk things, and to be helping somehow to settle the world. Women are different.”

“Challice’s practice falls short of his theory, then,” Dick laughed. “I don’t think he has contributed much towards the settlement of the world.”

"No, I suppose not." She hesitated. "Perhaps he might have been less unhappy if he had had some appointed work to do."

"He doesn't strike me as being unhappy," Dick said, with a passing surprise at her words, but it was not Chalice's affairs he was there to discuss. It was his own that were urgent.

"Will you miss me a little, Venice?" he asked half shyly, with abrupt transition.

"Oh, Dick, my bonnie boy!" she jumped up and put out her hands impulsively. "Do you think I am quite, quite heartless? Didn't I miss you sorely before—or are you only asking to tease me, and to get me to say some nice things about you, you cunning boy?" She drew back and looked up examiningly at his face, all lit and radiant now with happiness. "I believe you're glad to go," she said reproachfully, "and was it just a pretence, if

you please, about not being sorry to leave all the young ladies in Germany and Italy and come back to one poor girl in Scotland? Oh, fie! I believe you mean to steal back to them, and this going to London is just an excuse."

"You've hit it exactly; I want to get back to them," he laughed, enjoying her reproaches.

"But Dick"—here her voice changed again and grew earnest and sad—"if you do go away to work, won't you please get tired very soon and come home for a holiday? Because I'll miss you, Dick, I'll miss you dreadfully."

"I'll come whenever you send for me," he said, and his heart throbbed high with love and gladness as he held her two hands tight in his; "I came before. It was your message, Venice, that made me know that all the time I had been longing

to get home, and whenever I got it, I came."

"My message?" she looked at him bewildered.

"The message you sent me through Merrit;" he felt a vague surprise that she should have forgotten. "I always thought him too much honoured, for he's a good bit of a cad—but since you chose him for your messenger——"

"But, Dick"—she spoke very earnestly now—"I never met this Mr. Merrit, I never even heard of him till now, and if I had had any message, do you think I would have trusted it to a stranger?"

"Have you forgotten—so soon?" he asked a little reproachfully, but he was inwardly shaken with a great fear. He loosed her hands and made search for a pocket-book, which he opened hastily, taking from it a little packet. "You won't

deny that you sent me this?" he said, unfolding a letter and drawing a little ring from it, "it was the token by which I was to know that the words were yours—the words that gave me hope and brought me home."

She took the ring in her own hand. "It's like one I had once," she said wonderingly; "and here"—she turned it over in her palm—"is my name inside; you scratched it yourself long ago with a pin, Dick; don't you remember? Yes, it's mine, but how could it get to you?" she said, searching her memory vainly for any clue to the mystery.

"Don't tell me I've been building on nothing all this time!" cried Dick, with a sickness at heart that made itself felt in his words. "If you never sent for me, Venice——"

"It is quite true that I never sent for

you," she said gently, "but it is just as true that I wanted you home all the time. Did you need a stranger to tell you that, Dick?"

But he wanted more than the mere assurance of her constant kindness; the time was past when that could satisfy him. He knew now how eagerly he had built on this hope that seemed to be falling in ruins about him, and he felt that the whole truth must be spoken between them.

"Never mind about the message," he said; "whether you sent it or not, would have made no difference—it's a question for Merrit and me to settle—that's all," his voice grew a little hard. "Before I got it and the ring I knew what I wanted—I think I must have known all my life long since we were little together that I loved you, Venice, and the words that I

thought were yours only made me a little more bold to hope. Oh, my dearest," he broke off, startled by the pallor of the face she lifted to his, "won't you say something—have you nothing for me to take with me out into the world—must I go and leave this dream of my life behind?"

"Oh, why did you ask me, since I must only hurt and grieve you!" she said covering her face with her hands. "I never thought of this—it seemed so natural, just you and me always together since we were little and now—— How did he dare!" she broke off, looking up with sudden fire in her eyes. "It was shameful; it was cruel to you and to me too!"

Dick made a gesture that boded no good towards Mr. Merrit, but he controlled himself.

"You say you have never thought of it, Venice; will you think of it now? And some day—it may be a good while off—when I have done something and made a little place for myself among other men, will you let me come back, and if there is no one else—— There is no one else?" he questioned with a quick change of voice.

"No one;" she opened her beautiful eyes wide in her surprise. "How could you think it?"

"Then some day—when I come again—you will give me your answer?"

She let her hands fall at her side with a gesture of weariness. "Oh, why should we think of difficult things?" she said. "You are going away, and isn't that sadness enough?" then looking up, and reading the sorrow that shadowed her boy lover's face, her heart softened. Her life

looked so blank since he was passing out of it, her friend and companion, her brother all these years. "I will think of it," she said, moved by a sudden impulse to comfort him, "and when I know what the answer is to be——"

"You will send for me?" he cried eagerly, possessing himself of her hands again.

"As if you will wait for that!" she said, with some of her old lightness. "As if you won't be wearying for old Scotland, and making all kinds of excuses to come back to it!"

"One excuse will be quite enough," said Dick, whose spirits had risen at a bound.

"Would you like me to give you that little ring again, Dick?" said the girl, some time later, when the sound of the dressing-bell startled them into recollection of the

hour. "It is mine, and I will give it you myself this time."

"Not if it means nothing more than before," he said, growing bold.

"It means," she answered very gently, dropping it into his outstretched palm, "it means that I will be thinking—nothing more than that—and you will have patience? You may keep it till I ask you for it again, Dick."

That night it was known to everybody that Dick's resolution was taken past change, and that while Venice searched her heart and asked its secret, her young boy lover was to fight the world for her sake.

Chalice found himself alone in the drawing-room towards dusk. He was looking idly out of the window and thinking how strangely he had found himself involved in the lives and destinies of those

whose very names were unknown to him so little a while ago, when David came in with the tea-tray. The old man settled the cups with a certain precision, and, after a preliminary cough to attract his attention, he turned to Challice—

“I’m thinking, sir, ye’ll hae to gang ben to the laird and hae a bit crack wi’ him,” he said; “he was aye ower ta’en up wi’ the callant, and he’s sore vexed. And you’ll no mind his bits o’ ways—he was aye a wee short in the temper; and dinna you say muckle to him, but set him on speaking on himsel’, an’ I’ll bring ben the tea in a wee: there’s fine comfort in a cup of tea. I’m no misdoubting that you wuss us weel,” he said, as Challice remained silent in his surprise; but, in spite of David’s denial, there was both doubt and offence in his tone.

“You need not question that, David.”

Challice smiled. "I'll go to your master;" but while he spoke Dick himself came in with an alert and possibly assumed cheerfulness.

"The very man I want," he said to David; then he glanced from him to Challice and began to laugh. "Oh, I know him," he said; "he wants you to get round me to stay at home. Perhaps you'll be playing me the trick that was so successful with the Pole, eh, David?" he laid his hand on the old man's shoulder. "You don't know that story, Challice. When I was a boy——"

"You're na but a callant yet."

"Well, when I was a smaller boy," he corrected himself—"will that please you?—there came here a certain native of Poland, who fell in love with Venetia's German governess. And David, who is a confirmed and hardened old bachelor,

and has broken the hearts of quite a succession of housekeepers——”

“Hoots! havers!” said David, yet as if he enjoyed the accusation.

“Scented an elopement, and what do you suppose he did?”

“I just sneaked the door on him and took awa’s coat an’ his breeks.” David looked at Challice with a sly eye, forestalling the narrator.

“But that Pole was too much for you, David, for he managed his tryst by borrowing from your wardrobe without waiting for permission. I hope you won’t reduce me to that pass.”

“I’m no troubling my head about you,” David retorted crossly; “it’s the laird I’m thinking o’.”

“Challice will go to him and talk him over. You’ll do it, won’t you?”

What, Dick too? For the second time

that day he had been called on for help and counsel. He felt that he must go away before his interests grew too deeply involved—before—— If Venice, for instance, came to him next, what could he say to her?

V.

"It's a braw day," said Venice to herself as she stood at the door of her home and looked out on her own familiar world, its tranquil beauty taking on an air of mystery from the heat that thus early hung in a brooding haze over the distant woods—"it's a braw day."

"And a bonnie lady to match the braw day," said a voice behind her, and Venice turned to Owen Challice with a curtsy.

"Thank you, sir; you are learning to speak Scotch finely. I'm glad you like my gown. I think it's very pretty myself; but then it is a great occasion."

"If you were better up in such matters,

Challice," said Dick, joining them, "you would understand the magnitude of the occasion by the fact that Venice has put on her best bonnet. When a girl wears a bonnet it means serious business, and a best bonnet——"

"Dick, if you say another word," she menaced him, "there will be no surprise for you to-night, and as you are just devoured with curiosity—oh, I know it—what will you say to that? It's to be a happy day," she said, with a quick change of tone, looking from the one to the other; "I want it to be quite a perfect day—Dick's last day at home; so nobody is to grumble, and everybody is to be good."

There did not seem to be much room for grumbling, unless on the part of those who were left behind, for this was the chosen moment when Challice was to be introduced to the splendours of Edin-

burgh, and the three sightseers were bent on putting the best complexion on things, and crowding as much diversion into the day as it would hold. All the household was at the door to see them off, even the laird, whom Venice ran back to kiss once more, and whom Dick was fain to grasp by the hand as if this were their last parting.

“Granny,” he said, in the lightness of his heart at this restored friendship, “if you’ll change your mind—and since you’ve been to Aberdeen you have that privilege—and come with us, you and I will have a shop-window day and leave these foolish young people to do the romantic-rapture-business by themselves.”

“And my old man bedridden with rheumatism? you shameless laddie! Venice, my dear, you’ll not forget the ‘sweeties’ for him? If you do, you’ll have to settle it with the village bairns yourself.”

"Will ye have the denner keepit for ye?" David asked solemnly, as he shut the carriage door with his best air.

"We'll get some tea at the village," said Venice doubtfully, "and——"

"Isn't there some ancient hostelry where we might glorify the old days?" Challice struck in.

"Don't place your guileless confidence in that," said Dick, with twinkling eyes; "for if Venice has her way she'll invite you to sheep's head and trotters at the White Hart, and as for the tea, it'll only be a "wa' tea" we'll get at the village—a genteel delusion you've yet to be made acquainted with, Challice; so, David, you'll keep the dinner hot; it'll come in handy for supper anyhow."

These matters settled, and the last good-byes said, they set off on their journey to the enchanted city. Their way first led

them under the shadow of trees, now in full June leaf, and then on to the broad white highway, where the trees grew more sparsely and the landscape opened out into a vision of rounded green hills, with dark patches of forest clinging here and there to them, and quiet grassy glens, with blue-slated roofs dotted about and shining like steel in the sunlight.

Soon they came to a little village—a mere handful of houses huddled together, and sharing a common garden, gay with flowers and trim with shaven turf—where once upon a time there lived Jeames, the carrier, with Ailie his beautiful wife, and Rab, faithfulest of dog friends. Was it wonder that the tender pathos of that most moving story seemed still to cling about the place ; to come out and meet them ; to make them silent for a moment as they turned backward looks upon its scene ?

For the hand that wrote and the heart that conceived are stilled, and will create neither joy nor sadness for us any more.

As they drew near to the straggling suburb into which the city strays towards the south-west, Venice grew more grave, though her eyes were bright and her cheeks warmed with colour.

"Perhaps you wouldn't mind shutting your eyes, Challice," said Dick, with laughter in his own; "I see Venetia is longing to ask this of you. It's unpardonable, of course, but if people have the bad taste to prefer suburban villas to the High Street, what can you expect? Now, if you would let me blindfold you till we pass the real and come to the ideal——"

"I will look at Miss Dundas instead," said Challice, meeting her smile, "and I won't let my glances stray till she gives me permission."

She was indeed very good to look at ; better to him and of more value and interest than any city however fair—for he had wandered far ; his eyes were weary of beholding and admiring, and what he cared for most in all the day's mild distractions was the pleasure these gave her.

“ You may look now ! ” cried the girl, who had kept him to his word, for they had left behind them the gardened villas, which are the same all the world over, and the groceries and bakeries and butcheries that dog their steps and track them to the farthest outskirts. So, too, the narrower streets, where wheeled things throng and traffic is busy, and they had swept into the noblest thoroughfare Europe has to show.

Challice looked, and he saw Princes Street trailing her skirts in the sun, escaping from the shadow of the rock that frowns

above her and crowns her with majesty, and from the ancient town huddled on her heights and looking down with the disdain of the past for the present, of the old for the new.

He extolled it to Venice's content, disparaging other places that he might praise it the more, and very willing to be entirely ignorant so that he might have everything pointed out to him by so enthusiastic a guide. It was, as she had said, a "braw" day; the capital that is so beset and assailed with east wind—so often a gray and bleak disenchantment to the stranger—for once put on her robes of state, and from the hoary old lion drowsing in the heat to the long blue outline of the Corstorphine slopes, behind which the sun dips nightly, she was girdled with beauty.

"We shall go up there," said Venice, pointing to the gables and spires that rose

against the summer sky ; and as Princes Street was given over to nursemaids and perambulators, and the hour was yet distant when the pretty young ladies of Edinburgh make it their afternoon promenade, Dick consented to dismiss the carriage and go with them. They climbed up the Mound—the grave of the Nor' Loch, where our ancestors dipped their offending womenkind—and taking a narrow, malodorous short cut, presently found themselves in the restless thronging heart of the old town.

Looked at in one way it is all squalid enough in spite of the picturesque irregularity of its main street ; its vagabond closes—dark even at noonday—suggest ugly mysteries ; its crowd of vendors, but mostly of idlers, is rude and boisterous ; an unsavoury odour of poverty and dirt prevails everywhere, tainting the summer air.

But looked at through Miss Venetia Dundas's eyes it was a very different world, and Challice felt, as she told her story, that the nineteenth century was slipping from him, and that all the voices of the past were speaking to him instead.

"Any century you like to order," said Dick the impertinent ; "our show includes the best of all ages, or you can have a medley, if you like your history better mixed. Pay your money, gentlemen, and take your choice."

But they were indignantly deaf to him ; for who cares for a servile obedience to dates ? and what did it matter to any one but some musty old historian, if they liked to fancy devout Mary of Guise kneeling in her dim oratory, with its noble view over the Forth, while douce Allan Ramsay paced beneath the windows, busy with some new scheme of "godless diversion"

to lighten life for the young folks of his austere generation ?

“ What are a few hundred years more or less when you’ve got to invent the palace itself,” said Dick the mocker ; for they were indeed staring up at the orthodox theological pile that has risen on the ruins of Mary’s errors, and only to the eye of faith does she still walk these ways.

After that they turned their backs on Dick, and left him to bribe dirty little boys with halfpence to turn somersaults for his pleasure, and they saw a great many things that were forbidden to him. For as they walked about, easily accepted as a pair of inquisitive tourists by the poor people, well used to this sort of superior curiosity, the summer morning played strange tricks with this prettily dressed young lady and the gentleman who hung upon every word she let fall. For now it was breaking day,

and from out of those narrow tortuous alleys, still full of night's darkness, a dishevelled figure ran to meet them—poor Lady Primrose, flying from her fiendish lord. They followed this pretty young lady through all the rest of her tragic story ; they trembled with her as she looked into the magician's mirror and saw her faithless husband plighting troth with another bride ; their hearts were lighter when they knew him dead, and they were quite comfortable about her when they had finally married her to the famous Earl of Stair and made her happy ever after. Now it was gentle Lady Anne Bothwell, whose heartbroken lament floated their way, and a shadow fell upon them because they could not make a joyful ending to her sad story. And again it was Robbie Burns, Scotland's dearest lyrist, who passed them, striding towards Creech the bookseller's ; but the

sturdy ploughman had no eyes for them and no thoughts save for Clarinda, while his heart was framing burning words set to faultless music in her praise. A strange medley ; a dreamland of fantastic figures ; such tricks can imagination play us.

Out of the old time they were suddenly called to the new, whose realism no glamour softens, and she who brought them back was a wretched old hag who whined out her doleful story to Venice. She was a cunning old woman, and she knew that there is in most young girls a very tender heart for all suffering. And as Venice bent and listened to her pitifully, her grave beautiful eyes intently fixed on the withered face before her, Challice felt a strange thrill pass through him. Perhaps a man is never so near reverencing a woman as when some gentle charity busies her, and gives her a fleeting likeness to the angel

she may one day become. Had he been alone he might have silenced this beggar's importunity with a copper or two, but he now lavished quite a little handful of silver on her, and changed her meditated maledictions into blessings.

"Why," said Venice with a little reproving shake of the head, "if you are so generous you will have all the beggars of Edinburgh following us!"

"It is to be a happy day," he quoted gaily, "and that old witch's blessings will bring us good luck."

"I hope I'm wrong, and that you've duly exalted the immortal Boswell," said Dick, bearing down upon them, "but I've a dark suspicion, Venice, that you shirked James's Court when I happened to be engaged elsewhere."

"Oh, I don't own *him* for a countryman," she turned upon him calmly, "Scot-

land wasn't good enough for him ; he had to go to England for society. And couldn't he have found one of his own people to worship instead of that grumpy old doctor?"

"The dictionary was an Englishman, and so is Challice."

"I give you up the doctor," said Challice gaily ; "he was a gloomy misanthropist, but then, poor old fellow, he hadn't Miss Dundas to be his guide to the glories of Edinburgh."

"I'll show you the inn where he put up," said Venice, as a reward for this treacherous behaviour, "and where he went into such a fine passion because his lemonade wasn't to his taste. I daresay the dictionary was very useful, but he was a rude, ill-mannered old gentleman all the same."

"Take care, Challice," said Dick, with an anxious air, "I tremble for you. Let

your countryman's example be a warning to you ; couldn't you invent a North British cousin ? Oh, I forgot the Laird of Cockpen. I breathe again ; you are safe."

" Dick," said Venetia, with a great air of dignity, " we'll meet you at two o'clock at the hotel."

" Two o'clock !" he groaned ; " must I endure my inner pangs till then ?"

But they wouldn't listen to him, they sent him off remorselessly. What did they want with a mocking, irreverent boy when they had all the gracious company of the past to share their wanderings ?

Here was that stately lady, Susanna, Countess of Eglintoune—the patroness of poor authors and a famous belle and toast in her day—going in her chair to a ball at Holyrood House with a goodly train of fair daughters following in her rear : here neat little Lady Lovat, ending a stormy

life in the peaceful haven of the Blackfriars' Wynd—a "gimp" precise figure in her silken gown, mob cap, and lammer beads, as she passes up the High Street on some deed of kindness. The ghost of her wicked old lord—whose turn to be white-washed by the historians has not yet come—still haunts the old city's ways, and was seen by these two enthusiastic young people. He was so picturesque, by reason of his badness, cruelty, and avarice, that they took a lively interest in his enormities, and readily forgave him his share in the abduction of Lady Grange, since that stormy woman's troubles so fed and pleased their fancy. For to what long-suffering husband would it now occur to remedy his domestic sorrows in this dramatic fashion, and to claim the aid of a Highland host to subdue the wife of his bosom? Venice, you may be sure, had the whole story at

her finger ends, and could follow the lady through all the perilous adventures that were to end sadly enough for her in a life-long banishment ; and it did not fail to give spice to the tale that she was supposed to be the holder of some Jacobite secret, and was thus unwillingly a martyr to the Stuart cause.

What did they not do and see as the charm of this idle sauntering took hold of them ? They shuddered with the frightened fringe of onlookers at the Porteous tragedy, and they sighed over the victims who had suffered for conscience sake upon the gallows tree ; by way of a piquant contrast they peeped into the old Assembly Rooms and saw Miss Nicky Murray walking a minuet before an admiring audience : at St. Cecilia's Hall they heard the Italian music that charmed our ancestors, and there was a little supper at a famous tavern

to which they went when the concert was over—where many an honest young face was flushed, and many a voice raised high in praise of this or that “fair” who had just gone home in her chair.

And not less real to them than these flesh and blood people—who loved and quarrelled and were merry, according to the rude fashion of the times, and sad after a fashion which never changes—was Jeanie Deans, crying softly under her tartan screen as she climbs the street, for grief and shame and love of Effie, hidden behind the Tolbooth bars.

Time flew with all this conjuring, and when they came face to face with that phantom of the once ducal Canongate—its noble story reaching back through many centuries and ending in a seemingly hopeless and indifferent squalor, and to Darnley and Queen Mary, and that rugged and

harsh hero, John Knox—they found themselves with so much business on their hands that the hours passed insensibly, and it was with stricken faces that they looked at each other as the chimes of St. Giles rang out three o'clock.

“Dick!” they both exclaimed, and they tore themselves away without another glance, conscience-stirred at the thought of his defrauded appetite.

“Will London be at all like this to me?” Venice asked, as she walked quickly down the Mound at Challice’s side and saw the city spread fair before her, softened by the summer heat till tower and spire melted at last into a sea-dream.

“London is for the pleasure of the people who live in the country. I think some one has said that before me, but it still holds good; so I hope its newness to you will give it some charm. Will you

let me be your guide there—a poor but a willing one—as you have been mine here?”

“I should like that,” she said, lifting her clear eyes to his.

They found Dick's reproach bearable, he having blunted the keen edge of his hunger by eating all the dinner-rolls within his reach. When Venice went to take off her bonnet, Challice drew Dick into the recess of the bow window, out of earshot of the waiter, and it then appeared that the banquet they were about to eat had been privately ordered by Challice the day before, but he was still willing to get Dick's mind on the wine. What wine did Miss Dundas prefer?

“Champagne,” said Dick with decision, “every lady likes that best, and the less ‘dry’ the more she will like it. They know no better.”

So they had champagne and everything else that was in season, and that money could buy or imagination conceive as good to be eaten. They lunched in a room that looked out on all the gaiety of Princes Street, criticising the unconscious passers-by, or feasting themselves on the noble vista that closes the outlook with a memory of ancient Greece, as the fancy took them. They had two obsequious waiters to supply all their wants, and one of them presently brought and placed a beautiful bouquet at Venetia's side—a treasure of the rarest hothouse growth, that had come all the way from London. But she, being of a gentle heart, and reading, perhaps, something of wistfulness in a certain pair of eyes, while she was busy with praise of the waxen exotics, was all the while fastening at her throat a rose Dick had given her in the morning.

"It is half faded," he said, and yet he was very happy when she only smiled and let it rest in its appointed place.

After lunching they ordered a carriage, reserving their own for the homeward journey; they drove under the ramparts of Salisbury Crags, and skirted warily the sleeping lion that lifts its splendid bulk against the summer sky. Their goal was the village of Duddingston, where is a certain red-tiled house, reputed by tradition to have sheltered Prince Charlie before the famous victory of Prestonpans. This cottage was the object of their visit; for, having tracked the footsteps of the hapless Prince in the morning, they were anxious to crown him with success before going to his last stronghold in Roe Street.

It was, as Venetia had wished it to be, a happy day. The sun fell warmly

on the village, mirrored in its own blue loch ; open doors and windows gave them glimpses of the home life of this quiet place ; in the little cabbage garden of the red-roofed cottage they chiefly came to see a girl was at work, but she hardly looked at them, and went on with her digging as if she wished to explain that her sympathies were not with them in their veneration, and that to-morrow's "kail" was worth all the Prince Charlie's in the world. Their pity was equally lost upon her, and they turned their backs upon the sun-flecked plain that ripples to the water's edge, and took their way once more by the hillside, ready to outdo Roe Street in its Jacobite enthusiasm.

A happy trio, for if Dick ever felt a pang as he thought of all he was so soon to leave behind, he was resolute in refus-

ing hospitality to his fears ; time enough for these when this rare day should have ended. As for Challice and Venetia, it may be safely said that they lived only in the present moment—he in her pleasure, and she in the gladness of the whole summer world.

They had given no hint of their arrival in Roe Street, yet the sisterhood was there in full force to meet them ; the best tea-service was spread, the most cherished caps were worn in their honour, just as if they had received and answered one of those formal notes in which “the village” issued its invitations. It leaked out presently that Miss Honeywood, who was on principle a great walker, and who also made it a matter of conscience to see everything, had spied them in the course of their sight-seeing, and had given her neighbours timely warning.

"For we knew you would come, Miss Dundas, though you've been rather a stranger of late," she wound up with a sting and a welcome in one breath.

Chalice found himself accepted at once by all these kind hearts, and as he sat beside the beautiful erect old lady with the silver hair and the peaceful face, and heard her talk with such an old-world flavour of her youth, and all its generous enthusiasms, it seemed to him as if the magician's spell were about him still.

"Ah, you should have heard Tenducci sing 'The Flowers of the Forest,'" she was saying; "there is no such music nowadays. They praise the Jacobite airs and call them pathetic, but the heart and soul of them died when the good cause was lost."

While she talked, and he listened, with the sympathy he did not feel it difficult to

give, a whisper—perhaps because it was a whisper—came distinctly to him from the other side of the room. It was only Miss Susan Pollock—who loved a romance—stealing a private moment with Venetia.

“And so this is the heir; we heard that you had sent Lord Heatherleigh away. Dear, dear! to think that you refused a lord! We couldn’t quite understand it, but if it is to be this gentleman instead, my dear—if this is the favoured gentleman, that explains everything——”

Chalice never knew what Venetia answered—how she looked. He kept his eyes fixed on his hostess, and though his heart seemed for a moment to stand still, and then pulse on in wild throbs, he knew that he was talking coherently, and that he had not betrayed himself. There was a long confused space after that, of which

he could never render any account to himself; he only knew that the beautiful old lady near him had wandered back into her early life, and seemed to find him a patient listener.

"You will come and see me again," she said, extending a gracious white hand to him; "it is so few who care for the old stories nowadays." When he got up and the good-byes were being said, he discovered that Dick, who had been made much of as a hero of foreign travel, had somehow fallen into sudden disgrace. For Miss Sparling, who was in low spirits, had mentioned early in the evening that she was mourning the demise of her cat Watty, a beast of unapproached merits, whose sudden death had cast a shadow on the whole community.

"It's my belief he was poisoned," she said, as if Watty would have disdained a

less tragic end ; "he never had an hour's illness in his life."

"You should have him stuffed," said Dick, with careless cheerfulness, "and then you could have him to look at."

"Stuff my Watty ! I'd as soon stuff my mamaw to look at !" cried the bereaved lady in an indignant treble.

"Oh, what a shocking idea !" cried Miss Susan tremulously. It was felt by everybody that Dick had made an irretrievable mistake, and in compassion for the coldness he suffered at the good ladies' hands, Venetia cut short the tea-drinking and rose to go.

On the homeward way Dick made merry over his blunder, and hardly seemed to notice the silence into which both his companions had fallen. The evening beauty went with them, and lay like a hush on the landscape : to see Venetia lying back

among the cushions, a little tired, a little pale, who could guess with what a wild fervour, with what a shamed and alarmed resistance of an unspoken fear she was hoping Challice had not heard that indiscreet whisper of an hour ago?

They had almost reached home when Dick stopped the carriage and challenged Challice to climb the hillside, and share a wider glimpse of the sunset. Venice excused herself from going with them, and promised to wait for them. Challice had but a confused sense of the splendour Dick found hearty words to praise. He was thinking of the girl they had left sitting alone, and in his heart there was bitterness.

“Did you see?” she asked when they came back to her, “did you notice my visitor? That was Lady Jane; they got back from the Continent yesterday.”

Challice's eyes followed the little cloud of dust made by the disappearing carriage. "Then it is more than time that I was gone," he said gravely.

"She knew you were here; she asked me about you. How do people get to hear everything? I suppose dukes' daughters can know anything they want to know. Oh, but she was very gracious; she spoke of the heather-burning. She wants me to come and see her, she says she has something to tell me that will interest me—but, it's rather like an invitation to come and be eaten!" she ended with a gleam of her old spirit.

"Then I suppose — since dukes' daughters get their own way in everything—you'll feel bound to gratify her!" said Master Dick.

"No, sir! at least I won't sacrifice myself yet awhile. Lean forward and I'll

whisper something into your ear. Do you think you are the only one to travel, you conceited boy? Listen, Granny and I are going to London too: what do you think of that?"

VI.

“Do you think he will come?”

It was Mrs. Murray who put this question to her companion, and Dinah answered for perhaps the twentieth time, “I am sure he will.”

Mrs. Murray sat by the open window of her Bayswater mansion, for the day was hot, and even the air that came in languidly in fitful gusts was faint and unrefreshing. It was not a day when one would choose to be energetic, but it seemed as if something impelled the lady-help to wander to and fro like a restless spirit denied repose.

The room was a vivid comment upon the people who lived in it ; in all questions

taste Dinah bore herself authoritatively, and her personality was gradually stamping itself upon the surroundings to theacement of the too exigent cheerfulness that had so wounded the Botticellian brotherhood. In matters of dress she scrupulously refrained from suggestion, it already her example had taught its own lesson; there was here and there a girl who came to Mrs. Murray's Fridays who allowed herself to have a waist, and curtailed herself of an inch or two of heel; Mrs. Murray had also laid aside a bird of paradise dear to her heart, after one evening when Mr. Bolde had silently made his fiction apparent. But Dinah, who knew that she was a safe guide on all the minor points of life, suffered on another point a distressing self-mistrust.

She had been for a week or more—indeed ever since Venetia Dundas had given her

a delightful surprise by walking in and announcing that she was living in the next street—a prey to a secret doubt.

Dick was in the next street too; she had only met him once when she rushed off to return Venice's call. But that once had sufficed to cloud her satisfaction. Dick was all she had pictured him—a "bonnie" lad, young and fair, and everything that a maiden's hero ought to be—but he was grave, too grave, and there was something of eager anxiousness about him, as he looked at Venetia, that did not belong to the successful lover.

There was also at the time of Dinah's visit another gentleman present, who seemed quite needlessly to complicate matters, and for whom she could find no fit place in her imaginings. It is unnecessary to say that she at once conceived a quite unfounded dislike to Challice, and

espoused Dick's cause all the more ardently because she had done something to imperil it. "What if he ever finds out that it was I who sent him that message, and what if I made a horrible mistake after all?" Doubt of herself was so new to her that she was restive under it. Suppose that, instead of a benevolent providence, the end of her careless jest should find her a malevolent spirit? These were the thoughts that troubled her as she paced up and down the room, for the expected visitor was no other than his same Dick.

"You see," said Mrs. Murray, fanning herself inertly, "it's such a very little thing to offer him, brought up as he has been, and thinking himself heir to a property. I wish you would let me make it more than £250, Dinah."

"That would be bribery and corrup-

tion," said Dinah, who had steadily refused all the offers urged upon her to increase her own salary; "and if you proposed to give him more he would—he might think it was a sort of charity. The Scotch are very proud—but they are so simple too! There's something very fine about their all coming up like this to cheer him at the outset; I'm glad they will not need to know anything of the sickness of deferred hope, and the failure it so often ends in. Their faith is only just more beautiful than their innocence."

"If you think he will take it—and I do need a secretary, Dinah?"

"Of course you do!" Dinah responded with prompt cheerfulness. "I can manage the social part, but as for business——"

She was interrupted by Dick's entrance, and she experienced quite a novel shyness and constraint as she shook hands with

the tall, broad-shouldered young Scotchman, and introduced him to Mrs. Murray.

That kind lady gave him a cordial welcome. "It's good of you to come," she said, and then she paused rather helplessly, and looked at Miss Kenyon for guidance.

"The goodness is all yours," said Dick, pleased to be thus met; "Miss Kenyon mentioned in her note that you had heard of some office you thought I might fill. I have come up to London to seek work, and nobody else has proposed to give me any as yet."

"Yes," said Dinah, who had been lingering in the background, coming forward reluctantly, and overcoming her dislike to speak at all by speaking very fast. "Mrs. Murray has for some time been looking out for a secretary. She has a great deal of correspondence that I am

not clever enough to do for her. You know, in spite of the advances women have made, nobody quite trusts us with serious business yet; or we don't trust ourselves, which comes to the same thing."

(This was rather hypocritical of Dinah, for she felt herself quite equal to the task of ruling Mrs. Murray's colonial kingdom.)

"And—and—when Venetia spoke of your wishing to find something to do, we thought—Mrs. Murray thought that perhaps for a beginning, and till something better turns up, you might be willing to try it."

"My ambition never soared to the height of a secretaryship, and it isn't my willingness but my fitness, that is the question."

"Miss Dundas says you can do anything," said Mrs. Murray with simple faith in this verdict; "and I'm sure you look as if you could."

"Ah, but you mustn't take my character

from a prejudiced witness," he answered, with a new light in his eyes; "Venice talks a great deal of nonsense. I can write just decently—no more; I can grapple with the ordinary rules of arithmetic, and muster a little faulty French and German. I'm afraid a properly constituted secretary would have a much bigger list of accomplishments to show."

"Oh, but that's far more than Mrs. Murray requires, isn't it?" Dinah appealed to her. "I fear your French and German will get rusty for want of use, and a little colonial English is all you will have to cope with. Mrs. Murray has a great deal of property in Australia and New Zealand; Australia seems to be all right, and to behave properly to its sheep, but the New Zealand agent is quite frantic over the rabbit question. If he could discover the man who introduced the first

rabbit into the colony, I believe he would shoot him, and earn the lasting gratitude of the whole island."

"I'm sure he meant well, my dear," said Mrs. Murray pacifically, "and it looked quite homelike to have the little creatures running about."

"Not to speak of the merits of rabbit-pie, which he had in his mind, I daresay," said Dick.

"Oh, but you can have too much even of rabbit-pie, and if the whole population lived on nothing else for all their lives, it wouldn't make any difference in the numbers. This agent says there is no hope except in weasels, or ferrets, and he wants us to send him out four hundred. Now, how *can* ladies be expected to send him four hundred weasels, Mr. Fraser?" Dinah asked, with energy. "I don't believe I should know one if I saw it."

"I might manage that"—Dick laughed—
—"but——"

"But you think it's hardly a career?" she interrupted him brightly. "Oh, but that's only a beginning. Somebody has made a most depressing calculation of the rate at which the rabbits are to increase, and if his prophecy is right, your four hundred weasels will only be the vanguard of an army. In fact you may look on it as a scheme of colonisation. And then there are heaps of other things—questions about sheep, and grass, and fencing, and a hundred things that ladies can't know anything about."

"I'll be very glad if I can help you," said Dick frankly, turning to Mrs. Murray. "It seems as if it were work I might learn to do, and I will do my best to do it well."

"I'm so glad," she said cordially, "for

how would Dinah and I have found any one if you hadn't been willing to help us? And about the salary—£250 is very little, I know—and—but——”

“It's a great deal too much,” said Dick, warmly, “at any rate it is a great deal more than I am worth.”

Dinah had slipped away when this point came under discussion, basely leaving Mrs. Murray to vanquish Dick's scruples single-handed. And somehow Dick was vanquished after a time, and made by this kind new friend to feel that the favour was all on his side, and that he had rendered two people very grateful by his concession. It was impossible not to respond to such friendly trust and unaffected cordiality.

“There's the library,” said Mrs. Murray when all this was settled; “you would like to see it? And if there's anything that ought to be there and that isn't, you'll

please to tell Dinah, for I never had a secretary before,"—she smiled on him in broad content,—“but Dinah will know.”

Miss Kenyon came at her call to lead the way. She crossed the hall and opened the door of a large and handsomely-appointed room.

“This is your workshop, Mr. Secretary,” she said demurely. “I hope it is to your mind?”

Dick laughed. “I am not used to my new honours yet—and you?” he questioned.

“I am the lady-help, if you please, sir.” She made him a little curtsey.

“Yes,” said Dick, “I need not have asked, because I seem to know all about you from Venice.”

“Yes, oh yes,” said Dinah, with constrained hurry, all her frank ease vanishing ; “I love her so dearly. She is my best

friend, and—I have heard about you too. She has talked of you often and often.”

The young fellow looked at her with a certain eagerness which had yet a background of wistfulness; the same mood of hope clouded with doubt which had struck her before. He seemed on the point of some confiding speech, but it did not come, and he only said quietly, “Venice will be very glad and proud of this.”

“You are going to tell her about it now?”—she spoke with some urgency,—“she will be so anxious, she will be counting the minutes till you come back.”

Dick laughed and shook his head. “If I can find her,” he said; “I see so little of her now that this big London has got hold of her.”

When he had gone away Dinah lingered a little in the empty library, touching things upon the table, and putting this and that

ornament straight with a mechanical pre-occupiedness. She returned very slowly to the drawing-room, where Mrs. Murray had resumed her station by the window.

“Dinah,” she said between the slow waves of her fan, “I think we’ve got the very best this time. Job would have wanted me to have a secretary, and he couldn’t but be pleased with this lad. One of the old clan too,”—she gave a pleased laugh. “I was a Fraser before Job married me, and he used to say there was luck in the name; this young gentleman might have been my nephew, only that I never had any brothers or sisters, but I told him I liked him the better for his name.”

“Perhaps he is a cousin; Scotch people are all related to each other; he has a kind heart, and I think it would please him to count kin with you——” she paused and finished her thought to herself; yes, he

had a kind heart, but it beat only to one wish, and there was but one love that could wholly satisfy it. He had told her all that as plainly as if he had spoken it aloud. She had not been wrong in her guesses about Dick—but what of Venetia, and what, oh what, of the message that had brought him back to her side?

Dick went home in rather a sober mood for a young gentleman who has just discovered a career to suit him. Two hundred and fifty paid quarterly was not an immense fortune, though it was considered a munificent income by the good ladies of Roe Street. One might set up as a miniature householder on it; might secure a little maid of all work and a cat of excellent qualities, if one were a maiden lady; one might live at ease as a careless bachelor, and not be too deeply dipped in debt—but suppose one were a young man

with a girl-wife on whom one naturally wished to lavish everything that was beautiful and fair? Two hundred and fifty goes a very, very little way in pretty things and trinkets, and the pleasures and graces of life, as every one knows. Dick reined himself sharply in at this point, and lashed himself as an ungrateful repiner. Hadn't he wanted work, and here was work that he could do, and for which he was confessedly about to be greatly over-paid? It was the first upward step, and who was to forbid him to climb and at last to aspire to the prize on which his heart was set? Looked at in this way there was everything to cheer and nothing to discourage; he took hope to himself as he went.

His mood was still further lightened when on coming round the corner he ran against Challice supporting old Mr.

Arabin's straying steps, as they promenaded the sunny pavement together.

"You've got back—then Venice is at home?" he asked, as he passed them in haste now to tell his news, and Challice nodded an assent. Dick ran up the steps with a new alacrity. It was such a great thing to find Venice alone, and with no immediate sight-seeing cares upon her mind—with no Challice to come between them. Yes, it had come to that; fortune was only kind when it kept Owen Challice somewhere else than at Venetia's side.

There was, as Dinah Kenyon had hinted, something very innocent in the assured confidence of the little band who had come up to see Dick make his new departure in life. At the last moment it had been found impossible to separate the wife who gave herself up with such abandon and self-devotion to her gently dependent husband,

and old Mr. Arabin had been removed from his sofa, swathed in countless wraps, and transported like an infant to the big Babylon, to share like the rest in Dick's triumph.

For it never suggested itself to any of them that he might fail—that he might not find the work which was to found his fortunes and justify his decision to the only doubter of them all, the disappointed guardian at home. Owen Challice, who had preceded them to make arrangements for them, and to whom the world had long become an accepted disenchantment, might have set them right,—but it was never for him to cloud the faith and trust that shone out of Venetia's eyes and was reflected in Dick's.

There had been a question at first of an hotel and of lodgings for Dick while he begun his search, but these plans were

quickly over-ruled, and they took up their quarters in the neighbourhood of Notting-hill, to which Mrs. Arabin had some ties of early association. It was a different world to that she had left so long ago, but its very divergence—its betrayal into brick and stone—served to point many a remark and speculation in those little walks with her husband, to which she unfailingly devoted herself here as on the terrace at home.

As Dick ran upstairs to seek Venetia in the drawing-room he encountered Mrs. Arabin tying her bonnet strings in the passage, in haste to join the promenaders on the pavement. He did not delay her with his news; it was a fresh stroke of kindness this that fate was dealing him in letting him have Venetia's sole ear. He saw her so little now, for while he was busying himself about a career it had

fallen to Challice to initiate her into all the mysteries and delights of London.

Challice, who had long cut himself adrift from club life, had settled himself in a quiet hotel not far from them ; there was some vague whisper at first of his being only a passer-by on his way abroad again—for he had not hidden that he did not care for the round a man of leisure must needs lead in the capital—but after that first hint he had given no further sign of going away. He had come, instead, every day with some new plan or device to give one young girl pleasure.

Venice had tossed off her hat and was lying back in her arm-chair, with an array of teacups spread on a low table at her side.

“Granny, is that you?” she said, not lifting herself to look round at the sound of the opened door. “Is nobody going to have any tea, and am I expected to use all

these cups myself? I wonder when Dick will come back."

"I've given up wondering; he was always an idle loon!" said Dick, at the door, with a base imitation of Granny's deep-chested contralto.

But the girl in the chair was not to be deceived. She jumped up. "You bad boy!" she began, and then as she read the mischief in his eyes her own grew brighter. She crossed the room and laid her hand on his arm.

"You've got it," she said; "don't deceive me, tell me quick!" Mr. Secretary Fraser answered these commands by a profound bow.

"Oh, I'm so glad. Mr. Challice was trying too, but now you don't need his help."

"No, I don't require his help;" he spoke with a hint of pride. "I've got it,

or it's got me. I never knew two ladies so willing to be deceived. I tremble for the moment when they find me out!"

"Nonsense," said Venice, uplifting her chin, "I told them all your faults; oh, I didn't spare you; they know all about you. Come and I'll give you some tea, and then you'll tell me everything. Did you see Dinah, and isn't she delightful? and don't you think she is very pretty? I can tell you she is very clever; she has all sorts of ideas."

"What a lot of questions! Pretty? I don't know—I didn't look at her much."

"Well, look next time and you'll see. She's clever, anyhow."

"I didn't find her very alarming."

"Oh no, I daresay not." Venetia's lips curled themselves into an amused smile.

"What are you laughing at?" Dick demanded, but she would not tell him.

“ May I not keep one poor little thought to myself? and do you think, Mr. Secretary, that you are to know everything just because you are going to colonise New Zealand with weasels?”

“ Everything about you — yes,” said Dick, grown bold.

“ Very well,”—she assumed the air of a penitent,—“ I suppose I must begin at the very beginning. We went to the Tower—which, as you know, sir, is every country cousin’s first excursion—though there are no lions to see now except the dead ones. Like good Jacobites we paid our humble duty first to the rebel lords, as they call them here, who suffered for the good cause a hundred and odd years ago. Lord Kil-marnock is very handsome, and a much finer gentleman than Lord Cromartie, who sulks, but neither of them can hold a candle to brave old Balmerino; it was a sight to

see that noble old soldier, just parted from his faithful Peggy, marching to the scaffold in his rebellious regimentals—are there any such brave hearts nowadays? And you will be pleased to hear that the head of your clan—wicked old Lovat—died ‘extremely well’ too.”

“Always a dreamer,” said Dick, smiling, “or do those old ghosts truly walk the world for you? I saw one of my clan in the flesh to-day with nothing of the ghostly about her. My new mistress is a Fraser by birth.”

“Then your fortunes are made!” she cried, clapping her hands—“for isn’t the clan everything? You had better come with us to-morrow, and do homage to the martyr who first brought honour on the name.”

“With us?” said Dick, laying an odd stress on the last word.

“With Mr. Challice and me.”

“What — Challice again — is it to be always Challice?” cried the young man, his face flushing up as he heard the name he was beginning to hate. “Must the old be forgotten for the new, and is there nothing in the faithful love of years that it is flung aside when the first stranger crosses your path? I thought that women were true — I was fool enough to think that they could be constant — that they cared most of all to be faithful to old and lifelong ties — and now —” He strode up and down the room as his pent-up anger and jealousy broke the barriers behind which he had held them hitherto, and rushed on unrestrained. He was, after all, only a boy; and it was love and grief as well as wrath that burdened the torrent of his words as he poured forth entreaties, reproaches, complaints.

“It was I who brought him to you, and is he to take everything from me?” he demanded. He stopped in his wild walk to look at her as he asked this burning question, and then for the first time he saw how his words had wounded her.

She was lying back in her chair, pale and shaken, and with a frightened look in her wide-opened eyes that he had never seen there before. It was as if she were facing some dread to which his passionate upbraidings had given shape; listening to some inward voice that was not his.

At sight of her pallor, and at the tremulous quiver of her lips, he was of a sudden smitten with shame and loathing of himself. He flung himself down on his knees at her side, and hid his face on the arm of her chair.

“Oh, my dearest, forgive me if you can,” he said brokenly. “I am miserable, and it is because I love you so.”

“You should not have spoken—like that,” she said, with a sob in her voice, but yet she put her hand gently on the bowed head before her. “And Dick, dear Dick, we must trust each other, for there can never be any friendship like the old friendship—never, never.”

It was friendship she offered him, and he had asked for love. But he took the boon she gave him, and rose up ashamed, and yet comforted. She had told him he must wait, and he would wait. There was a lover long ago who thought seven years but as seven days for the love he bore to the woman of his choice—was his love less patient—was his Rachel less worthy of a lifetime's devotion?

“I am yours always; I will come to

you when you send for me," he had said once before, and he said it again next day when he parted from her, and went out to fight the world with her kiss upon his lips.

VII.

It was soon apparent to everybody, except perhaps to the two most deeply concerned in the knowledge, that old Mr. Arabin had made the last journey of his life upon this lower world of ours. It was not so much that he was dying as that he was very slowly, and yet surely, loosening his hold on living; it was not that he was growing old, but that his boyhood was about to cease here, and to begin again in that "imaginably better" world where we shall all be young.

Chalice was the first to make this discovery. There was a week after Dick had left the Nottingham apartments and entered

on his 'new duties at Bayswater, when Challice saw very little of Venetia. She was tired, she said, and the sight-seeing, which she had encountered with so much life and brightness, was for the moment at an end.

Was she grieving over her boy-lover? he wondered with a strange heaviness at his heart—was it because Dick's step was no more heard flying up the stairs that her own grew languid—because his riotous singing had ceased of a morning that she had shut the piano, and never drew music from it now? She was scarcely to be seen except in the evening when Mr. Arabin drowsed in his chair while his wife knitted by his side, and even then, when the talk rose and fell with lapses into silence, it was he who bore the chief burden of it. Venetia, though she spoke little, was gently frank as ever, but he was conscious of an

impulse on her part, constantly combated, to avoid him ; she wished to be, and yet could not be, the same to him ; their relations had undergone some subtle change, and he strove in vain to retrieve his lost position, and to lessen the distance that he felt was slowly widening between them. Was it indeed for Dick, her lost playmate, she was grieving, or was it—a formless fear, that made a cold place about his heart, took hold of him, but he would not put it into words, even to himself.

On those days when he could not but respect her evident wish to be alone, he yet came a great deal to the apartments at Nottinghill. He would not have known what to do with his time unless there had been that refuge, and he found consolation in giving himself up entirely to old Mr. Arabin. There was an odd, affectionate comradeship between the two that made

Challice very patient ; he listened to the other's prattle—which was only wise, because it was always kindly—with a revival of the pleasure he used to take in the analysis of character and of motive. The weather was bright and sunny, and the life that overflows into the quietest suburbs of London seemed to please the old man.

When Challice spoke of some tranquil country place, with shade of trees, and tapestry of flowers, his companion shook his head.

“I’m used to London, though you wouldn’t think it,” he said. “I was much here before I married, and I find myself a bit of a cockney still.” He laughed as if he took pleasure in the fancy that he was again a man-about-town, and though it was preposterous to imagine him that at any time of his life, Challice could only

laugh too. So they trotted about the squares and crescents of their respectable suburb, with occasional excursions into the park where it was easier to think themselves part of the fashionable world ; they were both, indeed, mere spectators of the play, but the one looked at it with the pleased delight of a child, and the other with the speculativeness of a disenchanted philosopher.

Sometimes Mrs. Arabin joined them in their daily round, but oftenest she let them go alone, leaving Challice with a warming sense of being trusted by the neat, precise old lady who so seldom relegated her duty to any one else.

“You will go with him,” she would say when Challice appeared of a morning with his daily offering of flowers, “and I’ll stay with Venetia. No, the bairn is not ill, and I’m not a bit anxious about her,

though she picks like a bird. We must have patience ; there are times when a girl cannot be hurried, and you must just wait till her heart speaks."

"It's we who must have patience," said Mr. Arabin with his pleased laugh ; "eh, Challice ? You kept me a sad time waiting, Mary."

"About five minutes," she said, blushing like a girl as she wound a scarf round his neck. "And Mr. Challice understands," she said half under her breath, as she busied herself with last cares about her husband, "which is more than you do, my dear, though I daresay you were quite willing to believe yourself ill-used." She dismissed him with a smile.

In truth Challice did not understand at all, though she seemed to allude to some past experience supposed to have been his, but he tucked Mr. Arabin's arm under his

own and took him out into the sunlight, and listened as usual to that old boy's light stream of talk while he grappled with his perplexity. For when Venetia's heart spoke, what would its message be?

It was in those walks, daily slower and daily lessening in distance, that Challice made that discovery about his companion. He recognised it with a pang, for he had grown to care in a half-laughing, half-protecting way for this kindly foolish old fellow, and to lose him would leave a certain blank in his life which no wiser person could fill. With the chill of this coming separation upon him he could not but reface some of his bygone wonderments. What fate was in store for a gentle soul such as this? Must the earthly horizon close about him, or was there a wider destiny awaiting him beyond its rim where simple goodness should be

consecrated to some large service ? Death had invaded his life so seldom ; for years and years it had not cost him any pang such as it would cost him now were this new friend to drop out of the little circle grown so dear to him. In face of its approach he felt a strong repulsion from all the old speculations that had fascinated and contented him once, for with that dread shadow at one's elbow who can blandly accept a theory of the universe "with God and the soul left out" ?

Naturally he thought a great deal of the effect this coming change would have on Venetia ; already he could forecast her tender trouble, and feel himself suffering a double sorrow because of the grief it was not his to soothe. But as yet the secret was his own, unless wifely love might have divined it. Venice, at least, foreboded nothing.

One morning, when he came as usual to Nottinghill, he found her alone in the drawing-room. She was arranging some of his yesterday's flowers ; her profile was towards him, and as she busied herself with finding room in a vase for a neglected rose, he had time to notice that she looked better and more cheerful.

"Mr. Arabin is tired and can't go out this morning," she said, turning to him and extending her hand, "and Granny is with him. I think we all grow tired in this big London."

"And yet the day is too fine to spend indoors. Will you not come out—you are better?"

"Oh yes, I am better ; I think I was only lazy."

"Then you will come?"

She looked doubtfully from him to the open window, still playing with the rose

she held in her hand, and he felt that she was combating again with an impulse to refuse. He did not know how it might have ended, for a sudden inspiration caused him to say :

“Wait, have you forgotten what day to-morrow will be?” He lifted a newspaper lying on a chair and handed it to her.

“The Chevalier's birthday!” she said with a smile, as her eye fell on the date. “If I had been at home I shouldn't have forgotten, for I always send flowers to Roe Street.”

“I remember hearing that, and why shouldn't they be sent from here as well? They have an art of packing flowers now so that they arrive as fresh as if they were newly cut. And why shouldn't we gather them ourselves? it would be doing our hero more honour, wouldn't it?” he smiled,

for their enthusiasm, worn in the beginning to give pleasure to the Roe Street ladies, was a little pleasantry between them.

“But it must be white roses, only white.”

“I was thinking of a little country place I used to know where every kind of rose you can think of is to be found. We might make up a party and go there this afternoon. Your friends in Bayswater—do you think they would overlook the want of ceremony and come on such short notice? And as we shall drive all the way Mr. Arabin might go too.”

“Do you think Dick would come?” she asked doubtfully, but with the light coming back to her eyes.

“Why not?” he answered quietly. He saw that she was willing to go if Dick would go too, and he strung himself to a

resolve. "I'll go and ask him myself. I don't suppose they keep him very close to his desk."

"Oh, wait a minute, please," she said eagerly, "and I'll ask Granny. I know she is longing for a day in the country, and Mr. Arabin too, though he pretends to like the town."

The minutes seemed to lengthen themselves while she was gone. Chalice wandered restlessly up and down the room. It was as ugly as are most furnished apartments, and its bareness was hardly redeemed by the flowers and books and womanly possessions scattered about. He lifted one of the books; it was a copy of Browning he had himself given Venetia; it fell open where a long thread of yellow silk, such as he had seen her use, was curled up and lay softly over the verses to Evelyn Hope. He read them with slow

carefulness as if for the first time, though he knew them by heart.

“ Yet one thing, one, in my soul's full scope
Either I missed or itself missed me——”

He shut the book gently, imprisoning the gold thread again. He looked up and round him and noticed that the piano stood open once more, and that the desk held that duet that two voices had shared in for his pleasure one day in the north country. And these things he took for a sign.

Venice came back with a face that had gathered brightness. “Granny says she thinks it can be managed if we don't stay too late. And if you don't mind waiting just another minute I'll write a line to Mrs. Murray ; I suppose that will be more polite.”

“I can wait as long as you like,” he said, taking up the newspaper while she sat down at the table and drew her desk

to her. She seemed to have a good deal to say to Mrs. Murray; Challice had conscientiously read two leading articles—with what mental profit need not be asked—before she came across the room to him.

“I’ll let you know the answer,” he said, “and will you please hold yourself in readiness for two o’clock? we can dine in rose country, so it’s only a question of plenty of wraps for coming home.”

“Granny will see to all that,” she answered lightly; “is there nothing for me to do—must you be postman and everything?”

“You have to gather the roses when we get there.”

But when he had got out into the street he found that his postal duties were heavier than he expected, for there were two notes, and one of them was addressed to Dick.

Whether Mr. Secretary Fraser chose

to receive this embassy sulkily ; whether he was sufficiently ashamed of himself to be decently civil ; whether two or three lines signed " Venice " bred a new cordiality in him will never be known—it is enough that the ambassador despatched a messenger to announce his success, and then went upon his way to ripen his plans. For though it was easy to say in an off-hand way that you could dine in rose country, it was the part of caution to send a telegram beforehand, and to have a little hamper packed by Fortnum and Mason, and to secure the best-going horses and easiest carriage to take you there.

The appointed hour found them all setting out in a large waggonette, where, by a deft arrangement of cushions, an easy corner was made for Mr. Arabin. Challice, in paying his visit to the livery stable, had hesitated at first between two carriages and

one, and some motive, not entirely selfish, perhaps, made him finally decide on one that should accommodate the undivided party. He was the last to mount the steps and close the door, and he found that Dick had secured a place next Venice, and that his own immediate companion was Miss Kenyon.

He had hardly noticed this girl friend of Venetia's before, but he was compelled to look at her now because he felt that she was looking searchingly and speculatively, as it seemed, at him. And he saw that she was pretty and that she had put on a wonderful frock of pale buff with lines of crimson, which proved that she understood colour better than Mrs. Murray, for instance, who wore a Paisley shawl and a gown that set his teeth on edge with a memory of sour apples.

But they were presently all on the

easiest of terms ; the matrons fell naturally into subjects they found it good to discuss, holding their talk across Mr. Arabin's cushions with a corroborative nod from him now and then. As for Dick, he was as happy as any young man ever deserves to be, and in the look that he threw at Challice he seemed to say : " I did you wrong, old fellow, and here's my repentance for it."

" So we've gone back to the days of Queen Anne, have we ? and it's the little Prince over the seas we're to toast ! And pray, Miss Venice, do they keep his Blessed Majesty Charlie's birthday too ? they crown him with Christmas roses, I suppose ; and that other poor beggar—' Henry IX. King of England, by the grace of God but not by the will of man '—surely you are not so cruel as to refuse him an anniversary ?"

How Venetia may have rebuked this

heretic is not known, for Challice found himself very seriously taken to task by his companion. "I suppose you despise the middle classes," she was saying, looking at him with lurking scrutiny and distrust in her brown eyes.

"I always understood myself to belong to them," said Challice lightly.

"I think not," she answered rather loftily. "I am speaking of butchers and bakers——"

"And candlestick makers," murmured Challice flippantly. "I beg your pardon, Miss Kenyon, but you see, your levelling process, though it's a generous theory, has never quite succeeded in practice. Put all men at the bottom of the ladder to-morrow with an equal chance of climbing it, and before night you would have the old class distinctions re-established; for the lazy would get the diligent to make wings for

them so that they could fly up, and the clever would push aside the stupid, and the nimble ones the slow, and you and I, for instance, by virtue of our superior ability and refinement, would find ourselves before noon on the topmost rung, despising all the herd below us."

"Then you think people should just stay as they were born and never make any attempt to change?" she asked, with an air of despising his frivolity that he found amusing.

"I've no objection to any change so long as it's a levelling up. I'll make room for them on my rung with pleasure, so long as they don't elbow me off."

"If you wanted to help them you would have to come down a step to meet them. Would you like to know what they think of you?"

"It would be very interesting."

"They think you a snob and a stuck-up vain-glorious creature, and they despise you and laugh at you because they know that they are quite as good as you ; and they are right. They are at any rate of more use in the world. Of course I am speaking of your class," she added calmly.

"I'm relieved to hear that," said Challice, with mock gravity ; "since the reproach is diluted it is just bearable."

"Will you come to one of our Friday evenings?" Dinah asked next. "Mrs. Murray will send you a card."

"If you think my life would not be endangered ? My reputation, it would seem, is already gone."

"That's just as you like. They are quite willing to know you and understand you better. You will find them delightful—after the first. I will introduce you to a young man who failed when crinoline

went out of fashion, and who now sells combs instead, and to another who has invented a celebrated tooth-powder. You will like them."

"They must be most engagingly frank ; perhaps such very virtuous occupations breed candour. I will come ; I will take my life in my hand and come."

Was she laughing at him, this dark-eyed young lady with the very pronounced views ? Whether she was or not, she seemed quite determined that he should talk to her, and that he should not have a chance of overhearing a word of what was passing between two other people on the opposite side of the carriage. He submitted to his fate, supported by the amusement she afforded him, and after she had forgiven him for being perfectly well dressed, and obviously neither a butcher, baker, nor tooth-powder maker, she be-

came as pleasant as any girl could be, and chatted with such success that they were well out of the lowest quarter of London and were drawing towards the genuine country before he had time to steal so much as a look at Venetia. Then he saw that the face under the broad hat, the face whose April changes he had learned to know by heart, was full of a quiet content, if not so radiant as that of the young fellow who sat as near her as he might, and said such things as he dared.

“Base occupations may suit our coarser sex, Miss Kenyon,” Challice said irrelevantly—for she had forgotten her comb and tooth-powder young men—“but princesses and queens are an order by themselves; these will always be while this old world lasts.”

“In Arabia the young merchants and even tailors married the princesses,” said

Miss Kenyon demurely. "So this is rose-country ; are we not to know its name ?"

"It has not got a name ; it is fairy-land. One of the magicians of your Arabia caused it to spring up in the night, and by to-morrow it will vanish, for the roses that bloomed for a royal birthday-crown can never be put to any baser use ; and if you came here to-morrow morning, Miss Kenyon, you would not find so much as a bud to put in your belt."

By this time the horses were reined in ; —their drive was over.

"This is the best day since we left Scotland," said Venice, giving Challice both hands as she lightly sprung down. "I thank you for giving it us."

That was reward enough, surely, and his heart felt light as they all sauntered towards the inn. He had called it rose-country, and it did not belie him, for the

very cottages seemed to group themselves so that they might best contrast the brave red and white of their drapery; and as for the inn, the Gloire de Dijon had taken it by assault and clambered to its very roof-tree. The Arabian magician with whom Mr. Challice was in league had done his work very well; he had remembered a clay soil, and had left the London smoke far behind; there was an appropriateness in the noble forest that fell away from the little village and made a background for its beauty that proclaimed him a true artist.

At the door a buxom landlady met them smilingly, and led them to the parlour, where dinner was already set, for in Arcadia the old early hours yet prevail.

Dick engagingly dismissed the maids, for it was to be an indoor picnic of unwonted magnificence, and they were to help themselves.

"At last I shall earn my name," said Dinah, kneeling before a hamper while Challice cut the strings. "What! pies and chickens—a whole shopful; oh, this isn't ours! we only brought cream scones and a chicken salad. I thought we were to live on roses and be Arcadian."

"I always understood that the toiling million on whom we are to model ourselves had a good appetite," Challice rejoined; "and I know that the princesses have ceased to content themselves with rice and a bodkin. There's some champagne, I believe."

"I wish my dear old ladies could be here," said Venice, who stood at the table while Dick thrust one thing after another into her willing hands. "It seems a pity that we who are only half-believers should have all the feasting."

"They prefer the mortification and the

penance, and they will sip that ancient port sacred to the occasion with headshakings that are better than laughter."

"It is very good port, the padre sent it himself. Poor old padre! I'm afraid he'll be very lonely without us all."

"We'll drink his health in champagne," said Dick, as if there were healing in the thought; "and for toasting purposes its the best wine going."

"Do you think that will do?" the table-maid appealed to the company, with an anxious survey of the feast.

"Salt and mustard and pepper," said Dinah, with a pounce at each article as she named it, "and another of Mr. Challice's pies to flank that one for the sake of symmetry. Rose-country appears to be a hungry place. Mr. Fraser, would you mind ringing the bell? I believe that's the butler's duty."

The elders of the company had been commanded to remain in the garden while these preparations went on, and they were seated peacefully contemplating a row of hives and inhaling the sweet breath of the roses with the serenity of people to whom picnics are no longer one of the joys of life, when Dick went out to call them.

"We can't match these in the north, eh?" said old Mr. Arabin, with a wave of the hand that included the whole garden. "My country's good for something," he said, as he took Dick's arm and trotted along beside him.

"It's the only thing you beat us in," Dick laughed back at him.

The English faction had indeed the worst of it this sunny afternoon. A Scot has but to take a single step across the Border to revive all his native patriotism (if, indeed, it ever needs rekindling), his

pride, his national traditions, his enthusiasm for country,—the *heimweh* which it is left for him to feel, in short, rather than to express with epigrammatic brevity. This putting on of airs and flaunting one's best clothes in the face of one's neighbours, as it were, is naturally exasperating to the Southron, who is quite ready to sneer at "Sawney" for his willingness to desert this beloved land, and there are sometimes hot words in consequence ; but there was no quarrelling on this occasion, for England hadn't a chance to hold her own. Her cause was hopelessly weakened by the desertion of Owen Challice, for had he not the baseness to laud and befriend the North as if he had been born among the heather, and where was his conscience that he dared thus turn deserter and betray the land that bore him ?

As for Mrs. Murray, to hear her talk,

Australia and New Zealand were only an extended Scotland specially created for the convenience and enrichment of North Britons.

"I knew some one of your name there once," she said, turning to Challice. "In Australia."

"Then my clan is larger than I thought; I have not visited that younger Scotland yet."

"It was a lady—a young lady," said Mrs. Murray, but Challice was carving and he did not hear.

They ate the pies and chickens with reminiscences of other picnics eaten "at home"; and they looked at the placid rose-crowned landscape spread before them with patronising approval, but always with the understanding that it could have been a great deal better if its happy lot had been cast four hundred miles farther north.

"It was the one thing my wife and I ever fell out about, this business of North and South," said old Mr. Arabin, smiling at them all as he leaned back against his cushion. "Our marriage was as hard to effect as the Act of Union, and I don't think she has quite forgiven me the accident of my birth yet."

"What havers!" said the old lady, blushing rosily. "I only said that nothing would ever induce me to live in England; but then you were free to do what you liked, my dear. And I may have said it was vulgar and stupid to think you couldn't amuse yourself out of London, and that it wasn't very creditable in Scotch folks to take all their ideas, like their fashions, from the capital."

"So we amused ourselves in Scotland, and if I haven't acquired a Scotch accent, I assure you, Miss Kenyon, it isn't for

want of precept and example. But you see we all drift back to the old home at the last."

There was something in the words and in the smiling look he gave them that made Challice start up and propose the toast of the day. So they drank to the king on the other side of the sea—passing their glasses across their filled tumblers as if there were still treason in their loyalty, and devotion had to be whispered with bated breath. They were but half-hearted believers, as Venice had said, in the cause for which so much good blood was spilled ; but, as they talked of that picturesque time, some of the old fantastic chivalry that lingered so long and died so desperately, visited their mood, and they forgot the stains and blots that mar the story of the fallen house, in the tragedy and pathos that wrap its conclusion.

And when Venice repeated the lines which his most ardent supporter has put into the mouth of Charles Edward at Versailles, did not their hearts too throb with—

“that supreme devotion
Which the Southron never knew,
And the hatred, deeply rankling,
'Gainst the Hanoverian crew”!

And were they not as cordial in their scorn and as lively in their loyalty as if they were each two hundred years old, and had seen and suffered the things they spoke of, till matter-of-fact Dick slid away from the past with some plunge into the commonplace, and they came back to the everyday world of Queen Victoria, with half-ashamed laughter at the sentimental cast of their talk! But for all that, the champagne was very good, and but few of the pies were left.

When they were out once more in the

sunshine, the older ladies having elected to remain in the garden of the inn, while Mr. Arabin slept in the darkened parlour, Challice said with playful authority—

“Miss Kenyon, you may pick roses of any hue you please, except white; only the hands of a believer must weave a dead hero's crown.”

“I was a renegade in Scotland,” she retorted, “but you—you are a deserter in your own country too.”

“Yet the white roses are not for me.”

So it fell to Venice—least successful doubter of them all—to choose the flowers and bind them together. Every cottage they came to yielded her its contribution—for she passed by the red and pink and yellow, and sought out only the white that grew in shaded places, as if their sad destiny were known to them, and something of misfortune clung to them still.

Challice watched her from a little distance, while he loitered beside Dinah and shook the earwigs from her flowers. He had to content himself with distant glances, for Dinah seemed determined that Dick should for once have an innings, and she used a great many simple devices, that she no doubt thought deeply artful, to keep Challice at her side. He was surprisingly docile ; most men are when a pretty and lively girl commands, and he took some pains to choose the special shade of damask bloom that went best with Miss Kenyon's buff gown.

Arcadia is a lost country now, but they came very near finding it that day as they strayed in and out of the little gardens, chatting to delightful old women, who gave up their treasures as freely as if there had been no private arrangement with the magician of Arabia. They

tossed the toddling babies to the content of their mothers ; they patted rosy school-children on the head ; they listened while ancient patriarchs entertained them with talk that flavoured of a forgotten world, and all the while there was in the air the hum of bees making music to flowers that were vivid with June sunshine.

Arcadia must be very near ; beyond the wood, perhaps, from whose shadow a boy and a girl are straying into the light ; and the girl has white roses in her lap, and as she seats herself upon a fallen trunk they drop all about her, and one alights beside the boy who has flung himself at her feet.

“Give it me,” he says, “just one bud. Haven’t I a birthday too, as well as any Pretender of them all ? What a stingy Venice to refuse a poor fellow so much as a bud !”

“Oh, not a white one, Dick ! Don’t

you know what they say? It means that trouble goes with the gift."

"A spell;" he laughs as his hand closes masterfully upon hers, that would take the flower from him, and he looks into her wistful eyes with mirth in his own. "Then this will break it, for what trouble can come to you and me?"

Lost Arcadia, were you truly found that day?

VIII.

MRS. MURRAY'S idea of a secretary was that of a young gentleman who wore expensive clothes, smoked the best cigars, was willing to be petted by the women of his household, and occasionally, as an act of condescension, to drive with them in the park.

Dick ran as fair a chance as ever young man did of being utterly spoiled by this kind lady, who could not make enough of him ; it would have pleased her if he had been unpunctual at breakfast, and had come down with expectations of hot dishes cooked for his benefit when every one else had finished ; she would have liked him

to order the luncheon he preferred, and would hardly have been ill-pleased if he had lain on the sofa and asked Dinah to fetch him a novel from Mudie's. She was of the order of women who make domestic tyrants of men, and in her pitiable subjection and entire content to play a second part, it is needless to say that she was a very old-fashioned person indeed; and her attitude was only to be excused because she had lived all her life in the colonies, where new ideas make way but slowly, and where the primitive order of things still prevails.

Dinah, who was a representative young woman of the age, had naturally no sympathy with this state of matters, and would have come near to quarrelling fatally with Dick if he had accepted more than a meagre share of the flattering attentions that were showered upon him.

She watched him with afflicting scrutiny for the first day or two, and she only relaxed her vigilance when she saw that he opened the door for Mrs. Murray's exits and entrances, and even for her own ; that he excused himself from driving whenever he decently could, and that in matters of food his tastes were of Spartan-like simplicity. He fell back a step, indeed, when he was one day discovered lounging in an arm-chair, but he recovered himself by a request for porridge next morning.

"I wish he wouldn't be so hard on himself," said Mrs. Murray plaintively. "Fancy, my dear, Jones tells me he tossed the feather-bed and pillows on to the floor, and he said Mr. Fraser had told him he wouldn't have anything but the straw paillasse. You might as well sleep on the pavement ; there isn't anything but

a feather-bed in the house; Jones would give up his place sooner than not have one."

"I'm glad he's so sensible—Mr. Fraser, I mean."

"My dear, I think you're very hard on young gentlemen," said Mrs. Murray, shaking her yellow cap-strings—"you that have a brother, too."

"Perhaps that's why," said Dinah slyly, "seeing he's Botticelli's brother as well. The truth is, I'm tired of young gentlemen, and I should like to know a few young men."

"Where's the difference?" said Mrs. Murray pleasantly; "it's all in the name, and if you have the best, what does it matter how you call it? Your friend, Miss Lyster, now, when she spoke to me about the men the other night, meant the same people that I would call young

gentlemen. It's all how you have been brought up, my dear."

"Fanny Lyster's men are not my kind," said Dinah with some heat, "but I think Mr. Fraser will do if he's not corrupted; so don't suppose you are going to have him to drive to-day—he's got those letters to copy before post. I'll tell you what; we'll call for Mrs. Brimble, and I'll put on my tight jacket, and sit bodkin between the girls. It will be refreshing and edifying to hear how much Mr. Brimble junior turned over at the store last week, and it will be a very instructive topic for dinner-time. There's something so practical about soap and cheese."

It was thus of set design, and for his peculiar edification, that a very business-like complexion was given to the talk during the first week of Dick's new duties. Miss Kenyon had a surprising knowledge

of commerce for a young lady who could dress so prettily ; she was always glorifying business, and vaunting the enterprising spirit of the age ; she seemed at times half to regret that she had not exhibited it in her own person by inducing the world to buy the patent non-combustioning stove that was to work its regeneration. "I could have spoken with more authority," she thought, "but then I could never have persuaded Mrs. Murray to give up her close range."

For the first week Dick listened to all this talk with a mind astray, and there was a look in his eyes of pain and trouble that took Mrs. Murray's motherliness by storm.

"I'm sure that poor boy's not happy," she said, plaintively, but Dinah, the hard-hearted, only declared he wanted more to do.

One morning, in the room devoted to his use, he found a solidly-bound edition of Dr. Smiles's admirable works, placed in a conspicuous position as if they were urging their own plea to be studied. Dick burst out laughing as he opened one of the volumes, and noticed the deep pencil marks that scored approved passages; they were all about young men who had risen to fame by their own exertions, and who were crowned with happiness and virtue by their deeds.

But after that day in rose-country, a change came over his spirit, and he took to work with an appetite that satisfied even Dinah. He could not get half enough to do; the New Zealand agent, who wrote grumblingly, was remonstrated with in many pages, and soothed over with a detachment of ferrets; the Australian man, who penned smooth things,

was startled out of his equanimity by the tumultuous questions that weighed down his next mail bag.

Dick thought he knew something about sheep; but colonial sheep have ways and manners of their own, and when there is an ocean between them and you, they naturally become masterful. But there was a shepherd at Bayswater who did not intend to be mastered; he went into the question root and branch; he bought every book that ever was printed on the subject, and he pored over the bulky correspondence that had accumulated during Mrs. Murray's stay in London, till there were bred in him dark suspicions of the smooth-spoken agent, and misgivings as to the honesty of him who clamoured for the ferrets.

"You ought to have a lawyer," he said to Mrs. Murray, but she would not hear

of it; she who was so yielding on other points was not to be moved on this.

"Job would never have one, and the luck would go from me if I took one now." It appeared it was a sort of religion with the late Mr. Murray to hate the men of law.

"I wonder how he would have liked a secretary?" said Dick, with a laugh.

"He always meant to have one. He said it sounded well, and you needn't let out more secrets than you liked," said his widow innocently. "But, dear me, I've no secrets, and you're far better than a lawyer any day. Only, don't you bother, my dear. What does it matter if the Australian manager has spent too much? there's enough left; Job only wanted me to have the best, and there's enough for that, I suppose?"

"Oh yes," said Dick, "there's enough."

“But that Australian’s a blackguard,” he added mentally, “and his little game will have to be stopped.”

In the course of his investigations he lighted on some curious matter, which, doubtless, the late Mr. Murray would have withheld from the eyes of his wife’s secretary had it been in his power, but the knowledge, coming to him as it did, only made Dick more zealous of his mistress’s interests.

In a little time, when she found that he was happiest and blithest when he had plenty to do, she dropped one thing and another into his willing hands. She was no great scribe herself, and it was pleasant to go to his room and coax him from the accounts, which seemed so hopeless, by getting him to write a little note to this acquaintance or that, or to answer a request for a subscription. For, however long

society may be in discovering and adopting a rich old lady, philanthropy scents her neighbourhood by an unerring instinct. Mrs. Murray might have salaried a footman on purpose to answer the appeals of the people who wanted half-crowns and guineas ; who were bold on behalf of bazaars and soup-kitchens, orphans or negroes, or who had built churches and halls and expected a long-suffering public to pay the bills. There were also the afflicted martyrs who had been ruined by their friends and had become agents for coal—coal appears to be the first hope of a ruined man. These were the virtuous beggars ; there were also the kind who got well into the hall, and sometimes into the drawing-room, under cover of an insinuating address, and then produced a box of pens or a quire of paper for barter ; there were lastly the vicious sort, who were liberal in

maledictions on the house that did not relieve them substantially and with joyful alacrity.

The charities weighed on Dick's mind almost as much as the sheep and the ferrets ; he fought over the pen and paper vendors with Miss Kenyon, who loftily ignored his political economy, and said it was a sacred duty to encourage honest labour ; she bought pens enough to last a lifetime, but Dick declined to use them ; he also steadily set his face against the people who have a taste for building Gothic or Byzantine churches with a fine disregard for the architect's bill.

Mrs. Murray was always slipping into Dick's room, ostensibly to coax him to a milder humour, and then when she had got him to begin the battle did she not basely surrender and yield every point, content to let the cause be lost since she had made

him forget his work for a little? It was quite a triumph for her when he pushed aside his chair and began walking up and down the room.

“Suppose I were to build a house in the Elizabethan or the Queen Anne or any style my fancy led me to choose, and then get up a bazaar——”

“What sort of a house is yours in Scotland?” This was very artful of Mrs. Murray, for she knew that Dick loved of all things to talk of his old home, and she had a knack of easy transition that made the digression seem the most natural thing in the world.

“A cross between Scotch baronial and something else; I’m not up to that sort of thing. It’s harled, you know, and there are pepperbox turrets scattered over it;” here he launched into a description that served him through several turns up and

down the room, and Mrs. Murray through a whole round of the stocking she was knitting.

“And when you’re married you’ll live there, I suppose?”

“No,” said Dick, coming to a dead halt. He did not speak again for at least two minutes, and then he said in an odd, half-shy voice—

“If you were a young girl, Mrs. Murray, and you cared a little bit for some fellow who was poor, would you mind giving up some things—living in town, for instance, instead of the country—or would you think it very selfish and mean of him to ask such a sacrifice of you?”

“Me?—no me! When Job and me were married we were as poor as poor; we couldn’t even keep a single servant, and I just did everything myself. Many a time I scrubbed the floors”—she looked with a

laugh at her plump hands which bore no traces of toil—"and as for his dinner, I can beat the best cook in London at a steak any day. And many a time, when we were able to fee people to work for us, I used to think we were paying away our happiness and comfort." She gave a little sigh. "No, no; no young lass would think it a hardship to work with her husband. But when you get a wife, my dear, she won't have to sacrifice anything, for there's the money your good father made and laid by for you, as I've heard——"

"The proceeds of the pill and the lotion," said Dick, with a laugh. "Now that's very hypocritical of you, for you know you are just longing for me to give it to that ritualistic young curate who wants to confer on us the honour of paying for his stained glass. But he shan't touch a penny of it. I think I'd better build a

hospital with it, to patch some of the descendants of the people whose constitutions my worthy father ruined with the best intentions."

"I think the young wife will find a better way than that to spend it." Mrs. Murray was always talking of this mysterious young wife, and somehow Dick did not seem to weary of this perpetual topic, which it was as difficult to keep out of their conversation as was the head of Charles I. in his namesake's.

But, as a rule, they had no sooner broached this exciting theme than they were interrupted by Miss Kenyon, who would come in with looks of reproach that covered them both with confusion, and made Dick plunge back into the accounts as if he had never left them.

Dinah generally entered to announce that some first-class cook, or highly refined

and accomplished governess, was waiting in the drawing-room till Mrs. Murray provided her with a situation. People who had wants were, as yet, Mrs. Murray's chief visitors ; this of course included the Highbury and Islington ladies, who only demanded to be set afloat in the best society, and also all the lady-helps, housemaids, lady's-maids, etc. etc., who, having failed to secure a sinecure in Mrs. Murray's own household, felt that this entitled her to provide them with one elsewhere.

Dinah, whatever her errand, always came into the room carrying a duster ; this particular quarter of Bayswater seemed defiled with a quite undue share of dust, considering the frequency of Dinah's appearances with that square of blue checked linen, and the vigour with which she used it. She began with the bookcase at the door and worked her way round to the

window, which she opened (it was a back one) that she might shake her limp rag defiantly at the clean blue sky. When she got round to the back of the writing-table, where Dick was again grappling with a mountain of figures, she generally had a word to say to him. It was oftenest—

“We are going out to drive, but of course you don’t care to come; if I were a man I should always prefer walking—it is so womanish to drive. If you should happen to be going Nottinghill way”—this always with the most careless air—“there’s a note you might hand to Venetia. She’ll give you an answer if you don’t mind waiting for it.”

Sometimes it was—

“Mrs. Murray is going to take Venetia to Richmond to-day; you might as well come; I hate to sit alone with my back to the horses.”

"I thought it was womanish to drive," says Dick.

"I thought it was gentlemanly to oblige a lady," retorted Dinah. "Of course if you don't care about it we could take Mr. Jack Brimble or young Venables—an airing would do him good—he works so hard."

"And wouldn't an airing do me good—and don't I work hard too?" Dick would ask reproachfully, but though Dinah consistently refused to praise him, it was generally contrived that he should occupy the room of the diligent Venables, whose virtue thus went unrewarded.

Those chance meetings with Venice, and the regular evening hour at Notting-hill which he allowed himself when his portion of figures had been wrestled with, were the chief satisfactions of his life. Yet—though Venetia was oftener to be

found alone than of old, and was always kind—he sometimes came away with an ache at his heart. They had fallen back on the old brotherly and sisterly relations, and he might have been content, but if a man asks a loaf, will a stone satisfy him instead? He was waiting for Venice's heart to speak, and her silence met him instead.

He was thinking a little sadly of his long patience one day, while he helped Dinah to arrange a list of guests for a banquet of special magnificence that was to be given in the following week. It was to be several Fridays rolled into one, and the social reformers considered it a testing moment; if their theory was good for anything it ought to triumph now, and north and west be finally and for ever made one.

Dick held a list of guests to be invited ;

the names were in Dinah's writing and were headed by those of the Nottingham party. Dick idled a minute staring at Venetia's name standing out in this clear, decided writing, and his thoughts went astray, but he shook himself free of his dreaming mood when Dinah suspended her dusting and came behind him.

"Let us look over your old lists and see if we've missed nobody, or shall we wait for Mrs. Murray?" he asked.

"Oh, she's being talked to by a superior governess—she won't be let off for half an hour. I daresay she'll ask her for Friday before she gets quit of her. We may as well begin, for there are all the cards to write. I'll light the lamp—it's quite dusky in this corner." She whisked matches out of her apron pocket and had the shade off and on again before he could help her.

"That's better. Let's see—we've got

all this lot." Dick scored off with a pencil, "Archers, Browns, Bensons, Augustus Dobie—who is Augustus Dobie?"

"Oh, he plays the flute—you may as well leave him in."

"Then he doesn't work—unless he flutes for his bread?"

"The idle people are brought here that they may learn the blessing of work," said Dinah severely. "Do go on, and don't be so frivolous," she urged him, for he was murmuring that he could have respected Mr. Augustus Dobie if he had supported himself on public charity at street corners. "You are just wasting time; I thought you were in a hurry to get away."

"So I am," said Dick.

They got on through a page without a hitch. Mr. Bolde and Mr. Papillon were born to advertise strawberry silk pocket-handkerchiefs and look beautiful, which

can hardly be called severe labour, but they crept in as idlers ; there was a Miss Sophy Lyster over whom they wrangled for five minutes. Dinah declared that she corrupted all the girls and taught them to be fast, and that she amused the gentlemen who were invited for their self-improvement ; Dick, who was frivolous enough to like being amused, stuck up for her and declared she was very good fun ; but she was finally reprieved and permitted by Dinah to keep her place on the list as a warning and example against tight-lacing and tying back.

The names were written alphabetically, and that which followed Miss Lyster's was C. H. Merrit.

"Merrit!" said Dick, staring at the paper. "There can only be one 'C. H.' Do you know him? Has he been here?"

Dinah stooped over his shoulder and dipping a pen in the ink drew a thick score through the writing. "He isn't coming," she said.

"Has he been here?" Dick repeated.

"Once. He is not coming again."

Dick paused a moment. "I don't know about that," he said hardly. "I knew him pretty well once, and I've a mind to renew our acquaintance."

"He's horrid," said Dinah pettishly, "and I put his card in the fire. How can you ask him since you don't know his address?" she said eagerly, "he isn't so very famous that his name would find him alone."

"He won't be found in the business directory; that's true. He was always an idler. You are right about work after all—it's the idlers whom Satan keeps busy with mischief according to the old nursery

hymn." Dick spoke a little bitterly. "But the drones are no harder to find than the workers; I'll get his address, and he'll have a card." He deliberately wrote the name above the deep black score.

Quick as thought Dinah leaned over and erased it once more.

"He is *not* coming! I won't have him, and—Mrs. Murray doesn't like him."

"Very well." Dick yielded the point. "Of course that settles it, I can look him up somewhere else."

"No, don't, please don't! I—we—I hate him!" she said, with a flash of her eyes and a stamp of her foot. Dick's back was towards her but he heard the sound of her heel on the floor and guessed the look that accompanied it.

"Well, I came pretty near to hating him too," he said slowly. "He played me about as cruel a trick as a man could

play another, and I mean to get to the bottom of it——”

He was interrupted by something that sounded rather like a suppressed groan, and he turned round in surprise.

“Why, what is it? Has he been impertinent to you—did he dare——”

“No, no, no,” said Dinah, shrinking back into her corner and hiding her face in the duster. “Oh, how am I to tell you!”

Dick stared at her bewildered, and did not help her at all.

“It was I who was cruel,” she burst out. “I made him write that letter to you and I sent you that ring; Venice gave it me; I daresay she has forgotten——”

“You!” Dick had risen up and his back was towards the light, but she could hear the anger and dismay in his voice.

“Yes, I.” She threw down the duster but she did not look up. The colour was

deep in her cheeks. "Oh, why don't you scold me? I wish you would. Venice and I had changed dresses and names, for fun, it was at that Professor's, where nobody knew us, and I did it for the best. He thought I was Miss Dundas, and I let him think it, and he spoke of you, and when he asked if I had any message for you it all at once came into my head that I would give you a hint. There was that old lord with his pomps and vanities and his title—a title is such an awful temptation to a woman—and I didn't know Venice then as I know her now, and I thought you ought to have a chance. Why don't you speak—you needn't hold in—and if it would be any relief to you to swear, I don't mind—I deserve it all. I meant to do you a good turn; I didn't mean to be cruel," she ran on incoherently. "Won't you believe me? I didn't mean to be cruel."

"It wasn't like Venice, and yet I believed it. It brought me home, and it gave me hope," said Dick slowly, not showing any desire to make use of her permission.

"And there was no one else then," she said eagerly ; "and when she refused that old lord I thought it was for you !"

"And you think now it was for somebody else ?" He spoke with the same restraint, but he was white to the lips.

"I think it is for you still if you will," she said, with passionate eagerness. "She thinks you very brave and noble for what you have done, and there is all the old past between you ; what stranger can meddle with that ? You have everything on your side."

"I brought him to her myself," said Dick, with a new shade of bitterness. "Somehow, I thought like you, that nobody could come between us."

“And he can’t; he won’t; he daren’t! She cares for you. I know she does; but it is such a long time before one is quite sure. And if you only have patience and courage you will thank me some day. But just now, if you would only be angry and rage at me it would be so much easier to bear.”

“That wouldn’t do any good. Never mind, Dinah,” he said kindly—the name slipped out involuntarily in his desire to be friendly, for, though he was Dick to Mrs. Murray, Dinah had still kept up the formality of Mr. Fraser. “Don’t vex yourself about it; I knew from Venice herself that she had never sent the message, so it’s nothing new.”

“But you want to quarrel with Mr. Merrit——”

“Well, it’s hardly his fault, is it, after all?”

"No, it's mine, all mine, and I hate myself for it." Dinah picked up the duster and hid her face in it once more.

"Never mind, Dinah," said Dick again, and this time he laid his hand on her shoulder. "I daresay I should have come home, and I know I should have loved her all the same whether there was anybody else or not, and perhaps there's a chance for me yet."

But that chance had never seemed so remote. Dinah had stabbed him afresh in her effort to comfort him, for she had put in words the fear that had haunted him, while yet he had refused it shape in his mind, and he knew that he had a rival.

Mrs. Murray came back flushed but smiling, as one who returns out of battle, too absorbed for the moment to notice anything unusual in the relations of the

young people towards each other. For the matter of that, there was nothing particular to notice ; Dick was seated at his desk again and Dinah was dusting with rebukeful vigour. Mrs. Murray sank into an easy-chair.

“Do put that thing away, my dear, and take a rest,” she said, holding herself back to avoid the blue rag that Dinah was whisking about her corner of the mantel-piece. Dinah hung the duster over a bronze Joan of Arc, and sank down on the rug.

“Such a tongue!” Mrs. Murray went on, alluding without further preface to her late guest, “but a very superior person ; she can speak six languages.”

“Such tongues, then,” Dinah murmured.

“Think of one head holding all that, and some days I can’t even spell my own language, as Dick there knows,” she

laughed pleasantly. "She goes to the Scotch Church——"

"She's been getting over you," said Dinah severely.

"No, no, my dear ; she says it's the only place you can get sound doctrine."

"You've been promising her something, I know."

"I didn't promise—I just said I would see." Mrs. Murray had the air of a penitent making a confession. "She's the tenth, isn't she, Dinah ? and people only want one governess apiece. I think you must send her a card for Friday, Dick ; I thought she might see somebody she would like to live with ; she's very particular, it seems."

"What name ?" Dick asked, dipping his pen afresh.

"I've got her address somewhere." Mrs. Murray fumbled in all her pockets,

then Dinah came to her aid, and the card of the accomplished linguist was at last found rolled up with a half-finished stocking in the knitting-bag. Dick copied the name very neatly just beside the blotted scrawl under which Mr. Merrit's was concealed. Mrs. Murray was wondering innocently how the card could have got into her knitting-bag, and whether her vigorous visitor had put it there with her own hand, but Dick was saying to himself that there was a writing of the heart that nothing could erase and no spell of time change.

"Do you think, Dinah, that if you were to ring the drawing-room bell, Jones would bring up the tea? It's half an hour before the time, but I'm as thirsty as if I'd been talking all afternoon instead of only listening."

"Of course," said Dinah, jumping up and glad of an excuse to get away.

"And Dick must come too. Do put away your pen, my dear ; I'm sure you've done enough for one day."

"It's only the list for Friday," said Dick with a smile. "I think I'll go out for a stretch if you don't want me. No—thanks, no tea."

Endurance had reached its last limit ; he felt that he must face the worst or die. Twenty-two is so tragic ; if love is denied, it clamours for death. At thirty, a disappointment of the heart does not keep any of us from wishing to be seventy or eighty, and from secretly consoling ourselves with the thought that there is nothing against our reaching four-score and ten.

IX.

OWEN CHALLICE was about this time absent from London for a short space on business.

On that memorable day in rose-country he fancied he had penetrated the secret of Venetia's quietness. She was pining for the country. He had a theory that he hated London himself, though he had hardly lived in it for a dozen years, and he could very well understand what an oppression the streets with their clamour and bustle must be to one born to the silence and rest of the hills. She was sickening for her own clean "caller" air and her old free life, but so long as that blithe cockney,

old Mr. Arabin, expressed a pleasure in a return to the world of his youth, he knew she was far too unselfish to hint at her own needs.

It must then be some one's privilege to think and care for her. There was Dick, to be sure, but Dick was a boy, and he could not know—he to whom town meant novelty and change—that Venice was just breaking her heart for the country peace and silence. But he knew. He had seen it in her delight that day among the roses, in her regretful face as she left the enchanted land behind.

Owen Challice reminded himself of a house that belonged to him on a still reach of the Thames; the scared summer which flies London town rested there in her full beauty; he remembered a lawn dipping to the water and a boat hidden in a rushy creek. He had not seen the place for

years, but he had a vision of westaria and Virginia creeper draping a cottage, and a memory of birds that sang loud and clear among trees. He had never let the house, and it was left in the hands of an old house-keeper. He ran down to it one day and made himself known to this person, who condescended to remember him after a time, and even to thaw into something that approached cordiality when she found that her tenure of office was not to expire, but that she was to be paid extra for waiting on some guests for a week or two.

Memory had somewhat glorified the cottage, but it was still a pretty place, and, with a little attention bestowed on the neglected garden, it promised to answer his purposes. On the occasion of his second visit he went carefully over the house; fires had been lighted by his orders in all the rooms to dispel the river chill; they

were somewhat small rooms, made shabby by long disuse; he decided that certain of them must be refurnished, and he took out a pocket-book and jotted down a list of things to be ordered. In this he was much assisted by his housekeeper, who pointed out that everything was on the verge of ruin, and that if he had not providentially appeared in the moment of need, or had timed his arrival but one week later, he might have found her entombed beneath a hopeless wreck. She took a dark and pessimistic view of everything. She had a habit of disappearing and returning with a broken chair, a kettle without a handle, or a lidless saucepan, which she held out silently, doubtless thinking these illustrations more forcible than words.

Chalice bore these interruptions with what patience he could summon, but when in the course of his investigations he came

to the little drawing-room, he said that he would go in alone.

"You will find everything as you left it, sir," said the woman, with an aggrieved sniff, "though it's not for me to boast of the struggle I've had to keep things together, what with the damp and moths, not to speak of mice and beetles and dry rot——"

He cut her short by walking in and shutting the door on her confidences. He did find everything as he had left it. Time had stood still, and he might go back twelve years in his life if he chose. There was, for instance, on the centre table a novel lying open and face downwards—a novel long forgotten by everybody except, perhaps, the writer of it. There was also a bit of woman's needlework, half-finished, the wools faded somewhat from their original brightness; it lay beside the novel

as if the worker had but thrown it down an hour before. He looked at them with no stronger emotion than one feels in turning back an old page in one's life—a past that is too wholly past to have any ache or sting in it—then, with a motion that was hardly even contemptuous, he picked up the book and the bit of gay embroidery and tossed them both into the glowing fire. He took a strange pleasure in seeing them flame up and fall to tinder: the woolwork was consumed reluctantly, but the fire licked up the book greedily: Challice staring at the embers felt as if he were burning his ships behind him.

He went back to town and gave a lavish order to an upholsterer. The cottage on the Thames was to be made lovely with rugs and pots, brasses, bronzes, and china, everything, in short, that good taste—that despotic god—pronounces worthy to be

admired. It was his plan, when all these decorations were finished, somehow to entice the Nottingham household to migrate riverwards. He thought it would not be very difficult to win their consent. He knew he should have Mrs. Arabin and Venetia on his side, and the doctor might be counted on as an ally, for he had said that there was nothing amiss with Mr. Arabin except a want of vital power, and with doctors quiet and country air is a favourite prescription for disorders they don't understand.

After he had settled his guests in their river cottage, Challice told himself he would go away. He was always intending to go abroad, but it is a good thing to secure a wavering decision by naming a date—and the date for his departure would be the day he heard Venice sing as she rowed on the river.

He was pondering and settling all these things as he crossed the Park on his way to the hotel where he had rooms. It was just six o'clock, and there was an endless line of carriages crawling in opposite directions round the drive, and the Row was alive with riders. Challice paused, waiting for a chance to cross. He was in no particular haste, and as he was in good spirits, having just arranged that date with his conscience, the scene rather amused him. He took some satisfaction in hazard-ing guesses at the mental condition of the people who like to drive at the pace of a snail, and who enjoy looking at the same faces and bowing to the same hats and bonnets day after day and season after season. There is quite an art in bowing, and if you watch the plumed heads you will not have much difficulty in deciding whether it is a duke or a countess, or a

rich untitled nobody, or only a poor relation, who is being saluted. As Challice waited at his post there came a sudden block in the line nearest to him, the snail pace had become a dead halt. Opposite him a dark green landau, with a pair of high-stepping horses and a coachman and footman with powdered wigs, was arrested. It was a very complete equipage, and might have belonged to a countess, but there was no coronet on the panel. A lady occupied the back seat, and opposite her was a person in charge of a collie dog who might either be a maid or more likely a humble companion.

When Challice's eyes first rested on this carriage the lady had her shoulder and head turned from him as she nodded to some of her acquaintances crawling past her on the opposite line; but though he could see little more than the back of her

bonnet and a bit of a satin cloak, there was something familiar in the outline of her figure that fascinated him. Presently she turned to say a word to her companion, and that humble person fell to caressing the dog with a great show of goodwill, but Challice saw nothing except the straight profile before him ; it was that of a woman of thirty-five, or thereabouts, but who looked much younger. It was a beautiful outline that was presented to him, clearly and delicately cut like a face on a Greek coin ; Challice heard some good-natured people behind him admiring the lady who was so quietly and tastefully dressed, and who had such an air of distinction. They were wondering who she was, and some one whispered that she was an actress, and another denied it and named a famous reigning beauty. To Challice it all seemed indeed an ironical dream, or an illusive

trick of the imagination ; he could have told them very well who the beautiful lady was, but as in a dream we struggle and cannot speak, so now he was dumb. The idlers who found pleasure in the spectacle of so many finely-dressed people pressed behind him, but even if he had been quite alone the power to move was denied him. The blood ran riot in his veins and his heart beat in dull, anguished blows ; it was a horrible nightmare in which he could but look and look again at the face so near him.

There is always something magnetic in a fixed eager stare, and doubtless the lady, who was used to admiring looks, felt the spell of those burning eyes upon her, for she turned her head and her own calm glances fell on Challice. The front face thus revealed was not quite so fine as the profile ; it would have been difficult to tell

wherein the shortcoming lay, but one of the people behind Challice, more sensitive than her neighbours, felt it by instinct. "I don't like her face," she said, but this person was immediately silenced and humbled by her friends, who declared she was no judge, and that the lady was a beauty and no mistake.

The beauty looked at Challice as one might look on the face of an acquaintance long forgotten; the faint colour did not deepen by so much as a hint on her cheek, but the corners of her mouth relaxed into a slight smile, and then she bowed.

All this Challice saw very clearly—still in his dream—and then there came a sudden easing of the pressure at the farther end of the line, and the carriage moved on with a bound.

Challice woke up from his dream, and he knew now that he had not burned his

ships behind him, and that the past still held him in its unrelenting clutch. Oh, bitter past, can you never rest in your dead clothes, must you always rise from the grave we have dug so deep and covered so carefully? Challice had not seen that face since it had answered his scorn with a smile, and his impotent boyish wrath and sorrow with a song on its lips, long, long ago in the cottage by the river. He had forgotten all that time till now; he had quite successfully and without effort lived it down; he had found so many other interests in life that that poor, dead and gone boyish passion had faded from his mind, crowded out by fuller experiences. It may seem incredible that vows so binding could have been so lightly thrust aside, but it was so. His heart had never been concerned, but his pride, his young, hurt pride had easily enough been healed. That

early episode had determined his life, perhaps, but he had found no ground of quarrel with his lot. Six months ago, had he met this beautiful lady he would have returned her greeting with politeness and gone his way, telling himself that he had forgiven her all that there was to forgive ; truly it was not so very much, for he had been happy without her, and he had not missed a single pleasure in his life because she had refused to share it with him. He was content that she should enjoy herself too ; he had only asked that their paths might not cross, and as their rendering of the word pleasure was very different, they had easily kept apart.

Six months ago a chance meeting would have cost him some ten uncomfortable minutes, or possibly even a sleepless hour of marvelling over his own old self, and then he would have let it pass from his

mind among unremembered things, and now—to-day—as he walked homewards he felt that he hated this woman whom he had never loved, and there was a wild wish in his heart that he might know her to be dead.

In the cottage by the river, though his fingers had touched the book she held, and the work she had trifled with, though everything about him seemed silently waiting her presence, he had experienced no emotion stronger than a cold dislike. It had needed the shock of a personal meeting to reveal his own heart to him, and now that he knew its secret—knew beyond any doubt or mistaking—what was to happen next?—what to be the end of it all?

While he asked himself these questions listlessly, an inner voice answered him clear and sharp—"You must go away now without delay;" from this moment there was

hazard in every look and word—there was salvation only in flight.

But he was in no mood to accept this answer as a revelation. Clearness of moral vision is not necessarily followed by prompt moral action; to know the right is not, alas, to do it. Challice rebelled against the force that commanded him to go, and found a thousand reasons for staying.

At such a time a man will be swayed by a very little thing. In the preoccupation of his mood he had let his feet carry him where they would, and he found himself by the round pond in the gardens, where some children were still at play. A little lad near him was launching a ship upon that miniature sea, and Challice said to himself; "If that boat reaches the other side I will go." He watched it with an eagerness never matched by the little owner as it struggled bravely before the breeze.

Would it reach the farther shore? His life seemed to hang in the balance. The fitful wind died down, and the tiny craft wavered, dipped sideways, and came drifting slowly, slowly back. Challice turned away with a laugh.

In his room in the hotel he found Mrs. Murray's card of invitation stuck conspicuously in the frame of the mirror over the mantelpiece; and it seemed to him one more reason added to the many good and fit ones that had already occurred to him why he should remain.

He did not present himself at the rooms at Nottinghill that evening, his friends there knew that business had called him from town, and there had been no fixed date for his return, but when dusk was falling he found himself irresistibly drawn to their neighbourhood. The one yielding made the next fatally easy.

The house was dark, and he could imagine Mr. Arabin fitfully sleeping, and waking again to talk while his wife knitted at his side. One window was open to let in the warm air of the summer night, and presently as he lingered, there came out to him low and sweet the notes of a voice he knew. It was Venice, and she sang:—

“ Peacefully slumb’ring on the ocean,
Seamen dread no danger nigh,
Winds and waves in gentle motion
Soothe them with their lullaby,
Lullaby ;
Soothe them with their lullaby.

“ Is the wind tempestuous blowing ?
Still no danger they descry,
The guileless heart its love bestowing,
Soothes them with its lullaby,
Lullaby ;
Soothes them with its lullaby.

“ He who when wild waves are rolling
Puts his trust in God on high,

'Mid the tempest's fiercest howling
Still enjoys a lullaby,
Lullaby ;
Still enjoys a lullaby."

There was great restfulness in the pensive air sung low and faintly as if to one who slept and would wake uneasily when the quiet voice ceased. But as Challice listened there was a wild struggle going on within him, for that clamorous voice was again urging him to flight ; it rent him with its vehemence ; he walked about through all the brief darkness of the June night, and day had risen from the east before he got home and threw himself upon his bed.

X.

LIKE all social reformers, Dinah Kenyon found that her path lay steeply up the hill Difficulty. Not for the world would this dark-eyed young lady have owned that she had failed, but she was oppressed, all the same, with a secret sense that she had not succeeded so brilliantly as she had a right to expect.

By this time Islington and Bayswater ought to have been wedded so that no man could put them asunder, and their courtship had not so much as begun.

Dinah's weak point was her own sex, and she knew it; she could get plenty of gentlemen to come to Mrs. Murray's re-

ceptions (for the Islington daughters are quite as pretty as their west-end sisters, and they understand the art of flirtation even better), but she could not get their women-kind to come ; she could not even induce her sister-in-law to countenance her. Fanny said great crowds made her feel ill, and a crush she couldn't stand—unless it happened to be a titled crush, which everybody knows is quite endurable.

The ladies of Dinah's own old set, indeed, all failed her, except Sophy Lyster, who thought it "too utterly delightful a lark to dazzle and bewilder the aborigines," and too splendid a chance of violating social rules, to be lost.

Then a much worse thing happened, for a young man who had risen somewhat above the social level of Islington fell in love with one of the daughters of the North, and had even proposed to her,

greatly to the wrath of his mother, who had plainly communicated her displeasure to Mrs. Murray.

"It's a pity," said the lady-help, who, enveloped in a large apron, was helping the secretary to put final touches to the decorations in the big drawing-room. "It's an immense pity. It would have been a beautiful experiment."

"What?" asked Dick, clasping a huge palm and heaving it under her directions into a new position.

"Young Savory's marriage with Annie Reed."

"Every marriage is an experiment," said Dick, with a touch of cynicism that sat oddly on him—a young giant in a rusty coat, swinging about the decorative foliage that was to make a screen for the musicians—"at best it's a plunge in the dark—a sea wherein you may encounter either

monsters or pearls, as the German sage hath it."

"Nonsense. Don't be so conventional. This experiment was bound to succeed, and it would have been a triumph for you and me, Dick."

"I don't quite see its bearing on my happiness," said Dick, with levity; "but if it will do you any good I'll be charmed to arrange an elopement. A carriage and pair round the corner—rope ladder from the first floor window—veiled lady—Bobby bribed to look the other way. We might screw quite a romantic flavour out of it, if we could get young Peter's courage to the sticking point."

"These class distinctions are so arbitrary—are we not all brothers and sisters?" cried Dinah, looking up at Dick, and speaking with an earnestness that was a humorous contrast to his flippancy.

"I don't think that view of our relationship would quite satisfy young Peter—at present," murmured Dick, peeping at her from between the branches.

Dinah had seated herself on a low step covered with red stuff. The green leaves behind made a pretty setting for her smooth little head, and her dark eyes blazed with an inward fire.

"And to think of the fuss they make over some ridiculous ancestor, who would be the first to laugh if he could be made aware of their pretensions!" she went on tragically; "isn't it almost ironical when you come to think of it, to be proud of your *descent*?"

"Must begin somewhere," said Dick, abandoning his palm and sliding down on to the step beside her, "and that's a sort of coming down that nobody objects to. I shouldn't mind a few dukes and lords

snugly tucked away in the family vault. Having a nimble imagination, I can dimly picture the lively satisfaction one might take out of so much illustrious dust."

"Well, the Savorys didn't come down far, if that's a matter to be proud of. The late Sir Peter was a haberdasher, and mayor of some provincial town, and he was knighted because he once gave Prince Alfred some lunch, and his son is too good for my little Annie, whose father is a haberdasher also, but who hasn't had a chance of feeding hungry royalty. It's too disgusting."

"It's a corrupt and rotten and pestilential world," said Dick shutting his eyes and letting his chin sink on his breast, but Dinah detected under this apparent acquiescence a subtle caricature of her own vehemence, and she jumped up quickly.

"Look here, if you idle like this, we'll

never get ready in time," she said with severity.

"I feel too depressed to work," murmured Dick; "my sensibilities are too keen. Why did you harrow my feelings with that picture of despairing lovers? Wasn't the world dark enough before?"

"Oh, as to the loving," said Dinah calmly, standing back and examining the arrangement of the greenery critically, "I shouldn't pity them so much for that, for they can each fall in love with somebody else—there's no difficulty about *that*, but if we could have got them married, it would have been such a victory for us. They are really so near in rank that the fuss would have been quite tremendous; far better for us than if he had been the Prince, and she the traditional bailiff's daughter."

"Well, I daresay with a little judicious

encouragement they would oblige us, if it's so important."

Dinah shook her head.

"Mrs. Murray has promised that she won't ask him any more."

"Pooh! he'll come without the asking."

"But I'm afraid it wouldn't be honourable to let him stay"—she looked dubious.

"Dick, you interfere dreadfully with the general effect—there's a whole palm hidden behind you."

"Well," said Dick, jumping up, "you haven't told me what I'm to do with him if he should turn up. Am I to put him out?" He squared his shoulders as if for immediate action. "If I'm to have the afflicting task of sending him home to his mamma a sadder but a wiser youth, let me brace myself for it."

Dinah looked carefully all round her, and then her eyes met Dick's laughing

ones. Did her own catch a stray twinkle?

"If you should meet him at the door"—this was said with great firmness—"you must put him out; but if he slips in when you're not looking—why, you can't help it."

"He's little and thin," said Dick with an equal gravity. "Happy young man! He doesn't know his blessings."

Dick was in high spirits; he felt benevolent even towards this hapless pair of lovers against whom the fates were at work, and he would have helped them if he could. If he had analysed his satisfaction he would have found it to be of the negative order. It was not so much that Venice was coming that evening (though that was a delight in itself) as that Challice was staying away. The invitation that had been sent to him had neither been accepted nor rejected.

"He must be still from home," Dinah said on the morning of the great Friday, instinctively guessing at Dick's feelings.

Dick only nodded, but there was a light of anticipated happiness in his eyes.

The first of the guests to arrive was Mrs. Brimble, who came about four o'clock. She remarked to Dinah, who helped her to shake out her flounces and remove her goloshes (the pavement was a little damp) that "the girls" had said that they would want a cab to themselves, and that she had just come off early to take a bite with Mrs. Murray, and secure a good seat.

Mrs. Brimble might be taken in a good many ways, but Dinah had very early decided to take her humorously, and stoutly declared she was own sister to a certain duchess whose acquaintance Fanny prized—only it was the fashion to

call Mrs. Brimble vulgar, and her grace original.

"I hope," said Mrs. Brimble, leaning heavily on Dinah's shoulder, while the lady-help tugged at a resisting overshoe, "I hope, Dinah Kenyon, you've got some proper beaus for my gels this time, for as our Jack says, 'There may be blood, mother, but there's precious little money among that Bayswater lot,' and it's what the gels' papa won't hear of, not for an instant, for he's a warm man himself, is Brimble, and it's warm men they must marry, unless it's a title."

"Mrs. Brimble," said Dinah, looking up with a face of mysterious awe and reverence, "there's a lord coming to-night."

"Well, I'm sure it's none too soon." Mrs. Brimble unpinned her head-dress from its protecting handkerchief, and turned it round and round examiningly.

"Here's Mary Murray been six months here, and only a lord now!"

Nevertheless it was clear the news had sweetened Mrs. Brimble's blood, from the care with which she adjusted the summer-garden upon her head, and the back glimpses she screwed and twisted out of the hand-glass. In her good-nature she even thawed into benevolence. "I hope you'll see that my gels are properly introduced," she said; "you may put Mariar down for the first quadrille with the lord; Mariar's got a new gown, and she's got more to say than Em'ly, and I'm sure our Jack will give you a turn before the night's over; he says you're first-rate at a hop, and our Jack is the best partner you'll get, lord or no lord, for you're only a companion, Dinah Kenyon, and you've got to remember your station in life."

"How good of Mr. Jack!" said Dinah

fervently, leading Jack's mother to the little drawing-room, where Mrs. Murray sat knitting placidly at the interminable stocking. Mrs. Brimble immediately began about the lord, and picked Mrs. Murray's brains of every particular respecting him; she was so amiable that after she had settled herself in the most comfortable chair in the room, with a screen at her back and a footstool for her black velvet boots, she began to find fault with everything. It is the way a good many people show their amiability, and she evidently took such genuine satisfaction in proving how deficient all the arrangements were, and how much better they might have been, that it was a pity to deny her this gratification, especially as it was too late to alter anything.

Mrs. Murray bridged the stream of "If I were yous," and "If you took my

advices," with an occasional "Indeed?" or a "Do you say so?" but it hardly ruffled her placidity even to be lectured and reproved. "I leave all that to Dinah and Dick," she said easily. "You see they know so well what's expected of me."

"That young man and woman take too much upon themselves," said Mrs. Brimble darkly, and thereupon the flow of her discontent was diverted to the secretary and the lady-help, and the reward that had been held out to Dinah was withdrawn. Mrs. Brimble grumbled all through the early dinner; it was by this time an insult to ask her to meet any one of lower rank than a duke; she even seemed to grumble murmurously in her sleep after the meal, and she woke at the first sound of the bell to a new vigour of fault-finding, so it must be supposed she was enjoying herself very much indeed.

The lady-help did not enjoy herself ; it was such hard work composing the varying elements, and her heart was heavy, she hardly knew why. The Islington ladies brought their bodies and planted them in chairs, seeming to think they had done everything that should be expected of them. All this well-dressed corporeity oppressed Dinah ; there wasn't a soul among them.

She had to be ten people that night, and every one of them a different Dinah. Here was Mr. Papillon, her fellow-explorer, absolutely refusing to sing, unless she would accompany him, and sulking in Botticellian melancholy because she turned him over to a playing and shrieking Miss Sharman ; Emily Brimble was sulking after a less artistic manner on account of Maria's new gown ; she never passed near the corner where Mrs. Brimble was

enthroned in state without dread of a clutching hand, and an angry demand that she should produce the recreant earl.

Early in the evening she came across a parody of Sophy Lyster that took her breath away ; this was a pretty and foolish maiden, who, after the fashion of most copyists, had exaggerated the original, and was even more successfully tied in and stuck out than her model. This culprit Dinah marched off remorselessly.

“Why, my dear Bella,” she said, “I’m so sorry ; it’s the heat of the room, I daresay, that has brought the hair all down over your eyes, and I don’t wonder you forgot your petticoat this stifling day ; it was ‘too too awfully, atrociously, and fearfully hot,’ as you say, but I’m thankful I noticed in time that you had forgotten that skirt. Come up to my room and I’ll lend you one.”

While she was releasing rebellious Bella from her willing bonds, and dabbing back the fringe of hair so that her pretty brow might be revealed, Venice came in, and Dinah threw down the brush with an exclamation of relief and joy.

"Oh, my dear," she said with a sigh of satisfaction; "you're a sight for sair een. You see, I break into Scotch at the very first glimpse of you."

"It's my thistles," said Venice, with a laugh. "Granny and I thought this quite a fine stroke of genius, and a delicate tribute to my country. Granny was to have worn some in her cap, but in the end she would not come. She would not leave Mr. Arabin; he isn't well, Dinah, and he isn't ill, and they pretend they don't know what is the matter with him, but I know,—he is seventy-five!"

"Seventy-five isn't a mortal disease,

my dear ; it's often just a slight attack which people get over, and don't have again till they are ninety. Come down ; I hope your thistles won't frighten away all the people who will want to be introduced to you with their '*nemo me impune !*'"

"I hope they will keep off all but the right ones. I met Mr. Challice at the door. He only got back last night."

Some impulse made Dinah look at her friend as these words reached her. They seemed not to belong properly to the sentence, and to have an odd irrelevance ; but Venetia returned the look with such frank and candid eyes that Dinah was half ashamed of herself, and said hurriedly——

"That dreadful little villain, Bella Carter, has escaped before I could get her strings cut ! It will serve her right if she has to stand all evening."

They entered the reception-room under

cover of Miss Sharman's song. Miss Sharman had a great deal of voice, and she let it out unsparingly, as if she was determined to sing down the people who wanted to talk. In England people never do want to talk except when some one is singing, and the company looked rather bored, and seemed glad of the diversion the two girls made by their entry.

They were used to Dinah—only Mrs. Murray's companion, and a forward, brusque young woman, who took too much upon herself, and dressed ridiculously for her station—but they were not used to Venetia. Even Mrs. Brimble, who thought her own girls the only ones in the room worth a second glance, clutched Mrs. Murray by the arm, and demanded aloud, in an aggrieved voice, "Who's that in the black tulle and the silver thistles?" and Mr. Papillon and Mr. Bolde, who sup-

ported different angles of the wall, lost something of their suffering endurance, and forgot their martyred ears in the satisfaction she afforded their eyes.

Dinah, out of respect for Miss Sharman's twirls and shakes, sank into a seat near the door, where she could see everybody. Dick stood in a far-off corner, where he had been talking to a plain girl whom nobody else noticed; but even across the width of the room Dinah could read the eager wistfulness of his eyes. Dick's expression always betrayed him—there was no hiding what he thought and felt. Dinah's glance wandered over all the sea of faces before her, bored faces, vacant faces, anxious faces, conscious faces—these last belonging to maidens who were flirting silently behind their fans—vulgar faces, like that of Jack Brimble, who looked as if he was always making a bargain, and

was calculating how he could best cheapen Miss Sharman's music ; honest faces, like that of the young comb-maker, who sought no pretence to conceal his yawns.

Suddenly her eyes fell on Owen Challice and rested there, at first with a puzzled wonder, and then with a curious undefined uneasiness. She wished strongly that he had not returned ; his presence gave her an oppressive sense of approaching trouble. He was so unlike her old conception of him—or was it only that he was so unlike every one else in the room ? She had thought him frivolous, a mocker at everything, a man who found food for laughter in all the questions she was earnest in trying to answer, but there was no lightness in his look to-night. His eyebrows which she had thought so supercilious were drawn into a straight line that shaped his mouth under the thin moustache.

Eyes and mouth are a pair of friends who never play each other false ; what the one reveals the other cannot conceal.

Owen Challice was looking straight before him, straight and steady at the young girl in black whose colour came and went with every breath, as if her heart beat flutteringly ; he looked like a man who had passed through some deadly mental struggle, or some grievous bodily illness, and yet Dinah had never heard that he had been ill. He was bracing himself, in truth, to a great resolve. From the moment of that encounter in the Park, when he had for the first time clearly read his own heart, his silence had become a crime. He must break it now, at what anguish to himself he only knew ; in the wild tumult of his thoughts he clung to this resolve as to a spark of light in a great darkness—

he must tell Venetia, and he must leave her.

Miss Sharman, whose voice had been falling into wondrous depths, suddenly lifted it up into an amazingly high note, and held it quiveringly there for at least half a minute. It was the end of the song, and it was greeted with murmurs of relief, and of openly resumed gossip and flirtation.

Before she had struck the final chord Challice had left his place and come over beside Venetia. He seemed to have forgotten that there were others in the room; he saw no one but her. He stood before her, and Dinah, sharing the same bench, could hear every word.

“It is so long since I have seen you; it is years, I think—a life-time—and I thought I should not see you again. Is not that strange?” He laughed, but there

was no mirth in his voice. "For I am going away to-morrow ; I am going away, and there is something I have to say to you before I go."

Dinah felt the words as if each of them dealt her a blow, and she saw the look of trouble, of sorrow, and, alas, alas, of more than these, that shadowed Venetia's beautiful eyes as she rose and, taking the arm Challice held out to her, went with him where he led her—away from all those faces—away from Dick who was coming eagerly across the room, and who stopped abruptly as if he were turned into stone. Dinah saw all that, and a strange passion of tears seemed suddenly to choke her.

She was roused from the stupor into which she had fallen by a rustle and bustle of arrival and a sort of murmurous whisper that seemed to pass from mouth to mouth : "So that's the lord ? Dear me, he's quite

old ; he's seventy, though his hair is dyed. But he's an awful swell. Who's the lady with him ?”

The lady was Fanny, and she leaned on Lord Heatherleigh's arm. Quite a long way behind, but as near as his wife's straight train would allow, came William, stepping anxiously.

Fanny had a drifting, swaying way with her, and her head drooped backwards to one side as if much contemplation and worship of art had given it a set, or perhaps it was only the unconscious influence of mediævalism. She looked as if she only wanted to press her palms together and wear a halo to be quite ready to step into a stained window. Altogether, Fanny's unworldly appearance, and my lord's very worldly chivalry, and William's effort to keep his head on one side too, and yet not to tread on his wife's train,

made a most impressive picture, and roused all the company into life and curiosity. A lord is, after all, a lord, and we are most of us snobs at heart.

Dinah let the procession pass her without so much as looking up, though she and Dick had taken a lively delight in speculating about Mrs. Brimble's behaviour to a real live nobleman. She did not notice anything till she found Fanny gliding and bending and melting at last on to the bench beside her.

"Lord Heatherleigh has been dining with us," she said, and her voice was faint and low, "and he persuaded me to come here. He is charming, charming; such an air of delicate distinction."

"Yes," said Dinah, with a great effort at liveliness, "he always reminds me of Agag, 'stepping delicately,' though the comparison is unfair to the barbarian prince."

"You have so many friends, Dinah, so many friends one never hears of in society."

"Agag has been dead a good while; he was murdered, you know." She was ashamed of her flippancy, which sounded almost ghastly to herself.

Mrs. William Kenyon looked pained. "I hope," she said, "since Lord Heatherleigh has consented to come here, that some of your old friends will take you up in spite of all that has happened. I see no one I know except Mr. Bolde and Mr. Papillon. I am glad to see, Dinah, that Mr. Papillon has not deserted you, and I hope, I trust——"

"Tell me about Lord Heatherleigh," said Dinah quickly, anxious to get Fanny back to a subject to which she was likely to stick. "Did Lady Jane come to dinner too?"

“Lady Jane is in Scotland. You have heard, I daresay, that Lord Heatherleigh’s approaching marriage with one of the De Courcy family is announced. The Hon. Evelyn de Courcy is young and quite a beauty, I am told. The wedding takes place in autumn, I believe.”

“So the Laird of Cockpen has actually got a wife at last, has he? But he should have fixed an earlier day; if I were the Hon. Evelyn I’d take him before autumn; to be married in autumn is too suggestive with such a bridegroom. And my poor Venetia”—she stopped short as if stung out of her levity by a sudden remembrance—“then Mr. Challice may not be the heir after all?” she said.

Fanny looked shocked this time. “One does not talk of those things—in society,” she said.

“One only whispers them mysteriously

over afternoon tea. I know exactly the right sort of whisper, Fanny ; I remember it of old."

This imprudent speech cost Dinah her companion. Fanny melted away from her side in grieved silence, and was presently seen in a group with William and Mr. Bolde and Mr. Papillon. But for the gentlemen's evening coats and crushed strawberry pocket - handkerchiefs they might all have stepped out of a Cathedral window together.

Dinah never rightly remembered all the incidents that made up the rest of that wretched Friday evening ; she got up presently and began to bestir herself ; she severed Mr. Papillon from the mediæval group and implored him to sing.

"I'm like a barrel-organ," she said. "I've only six tunes in me, and they know them all. Do sing something—anything

—and as loud as you can. If you won't, I'll ask Miss Sharman."

When Mr. Papillon assented with alacrity she was a little surprised, and wondered whether she ought not to have implored him so much, especially as Fanny was listening. Fanny had a way of looking as if she did not see you but something behind you, which was a little disconcerting, but she could speak quite to the point when she liked.

"Lord Heatherleigh noticed you," she said, "and remembered you. I will bring him to speak to you; it is well, Dinah, that you should be seen in his company."

So his lordship was led up, and graciously extended three fingers to Dinah. "I had the pleasure of seeing you when you were visiting your friend Miss Dundas," he said. "I understand that Miss Dundas is here to-night. I

shall be glad to see Miss Dundas. I have some information to impart to her which I think will interest her—which it is important for her to know. She is not at this moment in the room, so far as I can see, but doubtless she will come. I beg that you will apprise me of her return.”

“He is going to tell her about the Hon. Evelyn, and make her feel the magnitude of her loss,” thought Dinah, but the first notes of Mr. Papillon’s song arrested the answer on her lips. The Botticellian Brother was quite as determined as Miss Sharman to have an audience, and he sang with a skill that compelled a hearing.

Dinah set the words of the ballad to many strange thoughts, but most of all to the threefold love that was laid at Venetia’s feet, the love that piqued vanity and pride had been able to kill; the love

that must suffer and renounce ; the love that was crowned. She no longer felt Mrs. Brimble's angry eye upon her as she usurped the star of the evening ; she ceased to be conscious of Fanny's satisfaction in grouping her and her noble companion under the chandelier, so that everybody might see them together ; she was afraid to look round her in case she might meet the bitter trouble in Dick's eyes — Dick, whom she had so lightly summoned to love.

So she looked at Lord Heatherleigh instead, with a light contempt that would have been amusement had her heart been less heavy. It was an urbane face without much harm in it, but like many weak faces, it could harden under certain influences. As Dinah looked at her lord, his blandness was gradually overlaid by a cold dislike and surprise ; he deliberately

put up his gold eye-glass, and deliberately removed it again, and Dinah knew by a quick and sure instinct that Challice and Venetia had returned. Once again it happened to her to wait out the end of a song to hear words that were weighted with some troubled meaning she could not understand. She felt, rather than knew, that Challice was at her side, and that he held out a hand to his kinsman.

“You and I can do each other no more harm now,” he said. “There is nothing left to be told—nothing to be said that can hurt or pain any more. Will you shake hands before I go?”

At another time Dinah would have laughed at the astonishment with which this request filled Lord Heatherleigh. “Really,” he began coldly, “really”—he had to put up his double eye-glass before he could quite take in its meaning, and

when, lacking presence of mind to refuse, he extended a reluctant hand, it was only one finger instead of three that Challice grasped. It would have been comic if it had not been so deadly tragic.

“Miss Kenyon,” said his lordship with fussy flutter when they were alone again, “it is necessary that I should speak to Miss Dundas at once—at once. It is important that I should see her without delay.”

Dinah let him go without a word ; she saw him cross the room as if he were wearing his coronet on his head, and bow with his ancient chivalry ; she saw the poor pulsing blood leap into Venice's face and die away again leaving her oh, so pale ! she saw the beautiful eyes lifted with a look of pain and dread she had never read in them before, and she could bear it no more. She rushed away and gave an

order to the musicians, seated behind their screen of palms, and they struck up a gay waltzing measure that filled the room and set many light feet beating time to it.

Lord Heatherleigh with Fanny on his arm, and William following Fanny's train, left before supper ; Mr. Bolde went with them, and Challice, after that last word with his kinsman, Dinah had seen no more.

Some constraint seemed to fall from everybody when the mediæval group had disappeared. Dancing was kept up with great spirit, and Dinah was indefatigable in securing partners for bashful young men and neglected young women. When Mr. Jack Brimble, in spite of his mother's displeased frowns, good-naturedly offered to "give her a turn," she laughed in his face. Once she passed young Savory and the designing girl who wanted to entrap him, whispering in a corner, and she did

not send the young man home to his mother. It gave her a fierce pleasure to prosper these hapless lovers, and to conquer fate for them if she could.

Once, just after the dancing had begun, she met Dick. He had been walking through a quadrille with the plain girl whom he had already befriended, and he had just found her a seat. Dinah looked in his face timidly; there was nothing there to encourage her, and yet she stopped him.

"Venice wants to go home," she said, "and there is no one to take her."

Dick looked down on her with a hard light in the eyes that were usually so kind.

"Dick," she implored, "she is ill—for old time's sake." She saw him waver, soften. "Go, go," she said, giving him a little push, "she has no one but you." And he went.

"Venice," he said gently, "you want to go home. I'm here; I'm always here to do what you want."

She looked up and a half articulate cry escaped her.

"Come, dear, come," said Dick gently.

He came no more back that night, and the slow hours crawled themselves away somehow. The young people grew quite merry with an Islingtonian absence of restraint, and there was a good deal of giggling, joking, and repartee, that seemed very delightful to the authors of it, and much lively arrangement about going home before the last couple had finally disappeared.

At the last moment Mrs. Brimble discovered that there was no room for her in the cab, and she said that if Mrs. Murray would lend her a brush and comb she would stay all night. She borrowed a

dressing-gown from Dinah and pinned up the satin flounces, sending them home with many injunctions, under Maria's care. Maria and Emily were to hold the precious bundle on their knees, and it was to be removed from the cab before either of them got out.

Dinah's very last recollection of this dreary Friday was of standing like a meek culprit before Mrs. Brimble, and being lectured. The borrowed dressing-gown very inadequately clothed Mrs. Brimble's comfortable bulk, and she still wore the hanging summer garden on her head ; but her ludicrous appearance did not prevent her from being seriously and not at all humorously angry.

She scolded because Maria had not danced with the lord ; she scolded because Dinah had presumed to speak to him ; she scolded because that girl in black with the

silver thistles had usurped him just when he had been asking who her Emily was ; she scolded because Jack hadn't had a chance to invite him to buy his groceries at the store. The angry voice went on and on till Dinah got used to thinking it would never stop ; it went on even after Mrs. Murray had come back with the brush and comb to say that the blue bedroom was ready. It seemed quite likely that it might go on for all that was left of the short summer night.

END OF VOL. II.

